THE ROMANCES OF

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

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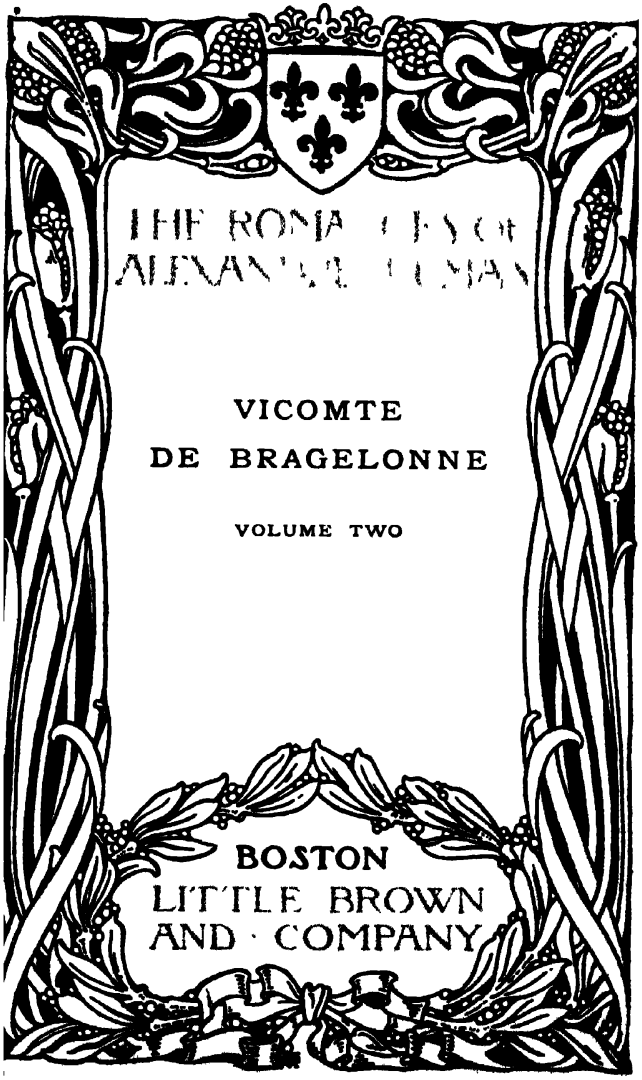
The D'Artagnan Romances

VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE

VOLUME TWO


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THE ROMANCES OF
ALEXANDRE DUMAS

VICOMTE
DE BRAGELONNE

VOLUME TWO

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AND COMPANY

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VOLUME II

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THE

VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE

CHAPTER I.

A PROCESSION AT VANNES.

THE passage from Belle Isle to Sarzeau was made rapidly enough, thanks to one of those little corsairs of which D'Artagnan had been told during his voyage, and which, shaped for fast sailing and destined for the chase, were sheltered at that time in the road of Locmaria, where one of them, with a quarter of its war-crew, did service between Belle-Isle and the Continent. D'Artagnan had an opportunity of convincing himself once more that Porthos, though engineer and topographer, was not deeply versed in affairs of State. His entire ignorance, with any other, might have passed for well-informed dissimulation. But D'Artagnan knew too well all the folds and the refolds of his Porthos not to find a secret if there were one there, — like those regular, minute old bachelors, who know how to find, with their eyes shut, each book on the shelves of their library, and each piece of linen in the drawers of their commode. Then, if he had found nothing, that sly D'Artagnan, in rolling and unrolling his Porthos, it was because, in truth, there was nothing to be found.

"Be it so," said D'Artagnan; "I shall know more at Vannes in half an hour than Porthos has known at Belle-Isle in two months. Only, in order that I may know

something, it is important that Porthos does not make use of the only stratagem I leave at his disposal. He must not warn Aramis of my arrival."

All the vigilance of the musketeer was then, for the moment, devoted to watching Porthos. And let us hasten to say, Porthos did not deserve all this mistrust. Porthos had no thoughts of evil. Perhaps, on first seeing him, D'Artagnan had inspired him with a little suspicion; but almost immediately D'Artagnan had reconquered in that good and brave heart the place he had always occupied, and not the least cloud darkened the great eye of Porthos, fixed from time to time with fondness on his friend.

On landing, Porthos inquired if his horses were waiting, and he soon perceived them at the crossing of the road which turns round Sarzeau, and which, without passing through that little town, leads towards Vannes. These horses were two in number, — one for M. du Vallon, and one for his equerry; for Porthos had an equerry since Mousqueton could use only a carriage as a means of locomotion. D'Artagnan expected that Porthos would propose to send forward his equerry upon one horse to bring back another horse, and he (D'Artagnan) had made up his mind to oppose this proposition. But nothing which D'Artagnan had expected happened. Porthos simply ordered the servant to dismount and await his return at Sarzeau, while D'Artagnan would ride his horse, — which was done.

"Eh! but you are quite a man of foresight, my dear Porthos," said D'Artagnan to his friend, when he found himself in the saddle upon the equerry's horse.

"Yes; but this is a kindness on the part of Aramis. I have not my stud here, and Aramis has placed his stables at my disposal."

"Good horses for bishop's horses, *mordioux!*" said D'Artagnan. "It is true, Aramis is a bishop of a peculiar kind."

"He is a holy man!" replied Porthos, in a tone almost nasal, raising his eyes towards heaven.

"Then he is much changed," said D'Artagnan; "for you and I have known him tolerably profane."

"Grace has touched him," said Porthos.

"Bravo!" said D'Artagnan; "that redoubles my desire to see him, this precious Aramis!" and he spurred his horse, which sprang off with renewed speed.

"*Peste!*" said Porthos, "if we go on at this rate, we shall take only one hour instead of two."

"To go how far do you say, Porthos?"

"Four leagues and a half."

"That will be a good pace."

"I could have embarked you on the canal, but the devil take rowers and boat-horses! The first are like tortoises, the second like snails; and when a man is able to put a good horse between his knees, that horse is worth more than rowers or any other means."

"You are right, — you, above all, Porthos, who always look magnificent on horseback."

"A little heavy, my friend; I was weighed the other day."

"And what do you weigh?"

"Three hundred-weight!" said Porthos, proudly.

"Bravo!"

"So that you must perceive that I am forced to choose horses whose loins are straight and wide; otherwise I break them down in two hours."

"Yes; giant's horses you must have, must you not?"

"You are very polite, my friend," replied the engineer, with affectionate majesty.

"As a case in point," replied D'Artagnan, "your horse seems to sweat already."

"*Dame!* it is hot. Ah! do you see Vannes now?"

"Yes, perfectly. It is a handsome city, apparently."

"Charming, — according to Aramis, at least; it is too dark-colored to please me. But black seems to be considered handsome by artists; I am very sorry for it."

"Why so, Porthos?"

"Because I have lately had my château of Pierrefonds, which was gray with age, plastered white."

"Humph!" said D'Artagnan; "but white is more cheerful."

"Yes; but it is less august, as Aramis tells me. Fortunately there are dealers in black as well as white. I will have Pierrefonds replastered in black, that is all. If gray is handsome, you understand, my friend, black must be superb."

"*Dame!*" said D'Artagnan, "that appears logical."

"Were you never at Vannes, D'Artagnan?"

"Never."

"Then you do not know the city?"

"No."

"Well, look!" said Porthos, raising himself in his stirrups, which made the fore-quarters of his horse bend sadly; "do you see that spire in the sunlight yonder?"

"Yes, I see it plainly."

"That is the cathedral."

"Which is called —"

"St. Pierre. Now look again! In the faubourg on the left do you see another cross?"

"Perfectly well."

"That is St. Paterne, the parish preferred by Aramis."

"Indeed!"

"Without doubt. Saint Paterne, you see, passes for

having been the first bishop of Vannes. It is true that Aramis pretends that he was not, but he is so learned that that may be only a paro — a para — "

"Paradox," said D'Artagnan.

"Precisely; thank you! My tongue trips, it is so hot."

"My friend," said D'Artagnan, "continue your interesting description, I beg. What is that large white building with many windows?"

"Oh! that is the college of the Jesuits. *Pardieu!* you have a lucky hand. Do you see, close to the college, a large house with steeples and turrets, and built in a handsome Gothic style, as that brute, M. Gétard, says?"

"Yes, I see. Well?"

"Well, that is where Aramis resides"

"What! does he not reside at the episcopal palace?"

"No; that is in ruins. The palace, likewise, is in the city, and Aramis prefers the faubourg. That is why, as I told you, he is partial to St. Paterne; St. Paterne is in the faubourg. Besides, there are in this faubourg a mall, a tennis court, and a house of Dominicans, — see! the one whose handsome steeple rises to the heavens."

"Well?"

"Next, you see, the faubourg is like a separate city: it has its walls, its towers, its ditches; the quay is upon it, likewise, and the boats land at the quay. If our little corsair did not draw eight feet of water, we could have come full sail up to Aramis's windows."

"Porthos, Porthos," cried D'Artagnan, "you are a well of knowledge, a spring of ingenious and profound reflections. Porthos, you no longer surprise me; you confound me."

"Here we are, arrived," said Porthos, turning the conversation with his usual modesty.

"And high time we were," thought D'Artagnan, "for Aramis's horse is melting away like a horse of ice."

They entered almost at the same instant into the faubourg; but scarcely had they gone a hundred paces when they were surprised to find the streets strewed with leaves and flowers. Against the old walls of Vannes were hung the oldest and the strangest tapestries of France. Over iron balconies fell long white sheets stuck all over with bouquets. The streets were deserted; it was plain that the whole population was assembled at one point. The blinds were closed, and the breeze penetrated into the houses under the hangings, which cast long black shadows between their places of issue and the walls. Suddenly, at the turning of a street, chants struck the ears of the newly arrived travellers. A crowd in holiday garb appeared through the vapors of incense which mounted to the heavens in blue flakes, and clouds of rose-leaves flew up as high as the first stories. Above all heads were to be seen the cross and banners, the sacred symbols of religion. Then, beneath those crosses and banners, as if protected by them, was a whole world of young girls, clothed in white, and crowned with corn-flowers. At the two sides of the street, enclosing the *cortége*, marched the guards of the garrison, carrying bouquets in the barrels of their muskets and on the points of their lances. This was a procession.

While D'Artagnan and Porthos were looking on with becoming pious ardor, which disguised an extreme impatience to push forward, a magnificent dais approached, preceded by a hundred Jesuits and a hundred Dominicans, and escorted by two archdeacons, a treasurer, a penitentiary, and twelve canons. A chanter with a thundering voice — a chanter certainly picked out from all the voices of France, as was the drum-major of the Imperial Guard from all the giants of the empire — a chanter escorted by four other chanters, who appeared to

be there only to serve him as an accompaniment — made the air resound, and the windows of all the houses vibrate. Under the dais appeared a pale and noble countenance, with black eyes, black hair streaked with threads of silver, a delicate, compressed mouth, a prominent and angular chin. This head, full of graceful majesty, was covered with the episcopal mitre, — a head-dress which gave it, in addition to the character of sovereignty, that of asceticism and evangelic meditation.

"Aramis!" cried the musketeer, involuntarily, as this lofty countenance passed before him.

The prelate started at the sound of the voice. He raised his large black eyes with their long lashes, and turned them without hesitation towards the spot whence the exclamation proceeded. At a glance he saw Porthos and D'Artagnan close to him. On his part, D'Artagnan, thanks to the keenness of his sight, had seen all, grasped all. The full portrait of the prelate had entered his memory, never to leave it. One thing had particularly struck D'Artagnan. On perceiving him, Aramis had colored; then he had concentrated under his eyelids the fiery look of the master, and the affectionate look of the friend. It was evident that Aramis addressed this question to himself: "Why is D'Artagnan there with Porthos, and what does he want at Vannes?" Aramis comprehended all that was passing in the mind of D'Artagnan, on turning his look upon him again, and seeing that he had not lowered his eyes. He knew the acuteness and intelligence of his friend; he feared to let him divine the secret of his blush and his astonishment. He was still the same Aramis, always having a secret to conceal. Therefore, to put an end to this searching examination, which it was necessary to get rid of at all events, as at any price a general silences the fire of a battery which annoys him.

Aramis stretched forth his beautiful white hand, upon which sparkled the amethyst of the pastoral ring; he cut the air with the sign of the cross, and poured out his benediction upon his two friends. Perhaps, thoughtful and absent, D'Artagnan, impious in spite of himself, might not have bent beneath this holy benediction; but Porthos saw his distraction, and laying his friendly hand upon the back of his companion, crushed him down towards the earth. D'Artagnan was forced to give way; indeed, he was little short of being flat on the ground. In the mean time Aramis had passed. D'Artagnan, like Antæus, had only touched the ground, and he turned towards Porthos, quite ready to quarrel with him. But there was no mistaking the intention of the brave Hercules; it was a feeling of religious propriety that had influenced him. Besides, speech with Porthos, instead of disguising his thought, always revealed it.

"It is very polite of him," said he, "to have given his benediction to us alone. Decidedly, he is a holy man and a brave man."

Less convinced than Porthos, D'Artagnan made no reply.

"Observe, my friend," continued Porthos, "he has seen us; and instead of continuing to walk on at the simple pace of the procession, as he did just now,—see what a hurry he is in! Do you see how the *cortége* is increasing its speed? He is eager to come to us and to embrace us, is that dear Aramis!"

"That is true," replied D'Artagnan, aloud. Then to himself: "It is equally true that he has seen me, the fox, and will have time to prepare himself to receive me."

But the procession had passed; the road was free. D'Artagnan and Porthos walked straight up to the episcopal palace, which was surrounded by a numerous crowd,

anxious to see the prelate return. D'Artagnan noticed that this crowd was composed principally of citizens and military men. He recognized in the character of these partisans his friend's address. Aramis was not the man to seek for a useless popularity. He cared very little for being beloved by people who could be of no service to him. The train of ordinary pastors — that is to say, women, children, and old men — was not the train for him.

Ten minutes after the two friends had passed the threshold of the palace, Aramis returned like a triumphant conqueror; the soldiers presented arms to him as to a superior officer; the citizens bowed to him as to a friend and patron, rather than as a head of the Church. There was something in Aramis resembling those Roman senators who had their doors always surrounded by clients. At the foot of the steps he had a conference of half a minute with a Jesuit, who in order to speak to him more secretly passed his head under the dais. He then entered his palace: the doors closed slowly, and the crowd melted away, while chants and prayers were still resounding abroad. It was a magnificent day. Earthly perfumes were mingled with the perfumes of the air and the sea. The city breathed happiness, joy, and strength. D'Artagnan felt something like the presence of an invisible hand which had, all-powerfully, created this strength, this joy, this happiness, and spread everywhere these perfumes.

"Oh!" said he to himself, "Porthos has got fat, but Aramis has grown taller."

CHAPTER II.

THE GRANDEUR OF THE BISHOP OF VANNES.

Porthos and D'Artagnan had entered the bishop's residence by a private door, as his personal friends. Of course, Porthos served D'Artagnan as guide. The worthy baron comported himself everywhere rather as if he were at home. Nevertheless, whether it was a tacit acknowledgment of the sanctity of the personage of Aramis and his character, or the habit of respecting him who exercised a moral influence over him, — a worthy habit which had always made Porthos a model soldier and an excellent companion, — for these reasons, say we, Porthos preserved in the palace of his Greatness the Bishop of Vannes a sort of reserve which D'Artagnan remarked at once in the attitude he took with respect to the valets and the officers. And yet this reserve did not go so far as to prevent his asking questions. Porthos questioned. They learned that his Greatness had just returned to his apartments, and was preparing to appear, in familiar intimacy, less majestic than he had appeared with his flock.

After a quarter of an hour, which D'Artagnan and Porthos passed in looking at the whites of each other's eyes, and twirling their thumbs in all possible different evolutions, a door of the hall opened, and his Greatness appeared, dressed in the undress complete of a prelate. Aramis carried his head high, like a man accustomed to command; his violet robe was tucked up on one side, and his hand was on his hip. He had retained the fine

mustache and the lengthened imperial of the time of Louis XIII. He exhaled, on entering, that delicate perfume which among elegant men and women of high fashion never changes, and appears to be incorporated in the person, of whom it has become the natural emanation. Only, in this case the perfume had retained something of the religious sublimity of incense. It no longer intoxicated, it penetrated; it no longer inspired desire, it inspired respect. Aramis, on entering the room, did not hesitate an instant; and without pronouncing one word, which whatever it might be would have been cold on such an occasion, he went straight up to the musketeer, so well disguised under the costume of M. Agnan, and pressed him in his arms with a tenderness which the most mistrustful could not have suspected of coldness or affectation.

D'Artagnan, on his part, embraced him with equal warmth. Porthos grasped the delicate hand of Aramis in his immense hands, and D'Artagnan noticed that his Greatness gave him his left hand, probably from habit, seeing that Porthos already a dozen times had injured his fingers, covered with rings, by bruising his flesh in the vice of his fist. Warned by the pain, Aramis was cautious, and presented only flesh to be bruised, and not fingers to be crushed against gold or the facets of diamonds.

Between two embraces, Aramis looked D'Artagnan in the face, offered him a chair, sitting down himself in the shade, observing that the light fell full upon the face of his interlocutor. The manœuvre, familiar to diplomatists and women, resembles much the advantage of the guard which, according to their skill or habit, combatants endeavor to take on the ground at a duel. D'Artagnan was not the dupe of this manœuvre; but he did not

appear to perceive it. He felt himself caught; but precisely because he was caught, he felt himself on the road to discovery, and it was of little moment to him, old *condottière* as he was, to be beaten in appearance, provided he drew from his pretended defeat the advantages of victory. It was Aramis who began the conversation.

"Ah, dear friend! my good D'Artagnan," said he, "what a fortunate chance!"

"It is a chance, my reverend companion," said D'Artagnan, "that I will call friendship. I seek you, as I always have sought you, when I had any grand enterprise to propose to you, or some hours of liberty to give you."

"Ah! indeed," said Aramis, with no outburst, "you have been seeking me?"

"Eh! yes, he has been seeking you, Aramis," said Porthos; "and the proof is that he has hunted me up at Belle-Isle. That is kind, is it not?"

"Ah! yes," said Aramis, "at Belle Isle! certainly."

"Good!" thought D'Artagnan; "my booby Porthos, without thinking of it, has fired the first cannon of attack."

"At Belle-Isle!" said Aramis, "in that hole, in that desert! That is kind indeed!"

"And it was I who told him you were at Vannes," continued Porthos, in the same tone.

D'Artagnan set his lips with a subtilty almost ironical. "Yes, I knew, but I wished to see," replied he.

"To see what?"

"If our old friendship still held out; if on seeing each other our hearts, hardened as they are by age, would still let the old cry of joy escape, which welcomes the coming of a friend."

"Well, and you must have been satisfied," said Aramis.

"So, so."

"How is that?"

"Yes; Porthos said, 'Hush!' and you —"

"Well! and I?"

"And you gave me your benediction."

"What would you have, my friend?" said Aramis, smiling; "that is the most precious thing that a poor prelate, like me, has to give."

"Indeed, my dear friend!"

"Most certainly."

"And yet they say at Paris that the bishopric of Vannes is one of the best in France."

"Ah! you are now speaking of temporal wealth," said Aramis, with a careless air

"To be sure, I wish to speak of that, I hold by it, on my part."

"In that case, let me speak of it," said Aramis, with a smile.

"You own yourself to be one of the richest prelates in France?"

"My friend, since you ask me to give you an account, I will tell you that the bishopric of Vannes is worth about twenty thousand livres a year, neither more nor less. It is a diocese which contains a hundred and sixty parishes."

"That is very pretty," said D'Artagnan.

"It is superb!" said Porthos.

"And yet," resumed D'Artagnan, throwing his eye over Aramis, "you have not buried yourself here forever?"

"Pardon me. Only, I do not admit the word 'buried.'"

"But it seems to me that at this distance from Paris a man is buried, or nearly so."

"My friend, I am getting old," said Aramis; "the noise and bustle of a city no longer suit me. At fifty-seven we ought to seek calm and meditation. I have

found them here. What is there more beautiful and stern at the same time, than this old Armorica? I find here, dear D'Artagnan, all that is unlike what I formerly loved; and that is what must happen at the end of life, which is unlike the beginning. A little of my old pleasure of former times still comes to greet me here, now and then, without diverting me from the way of salvation. I am still of this world, and yet every step that I take brings me nearer to God."

"Eloquent, wise, and discreet; you are an accomplished prelate, Aramis, and I offer you my congratulations."

"But," said Aramis, smiling, "you did not come here only for the purpose of paying me compliments. Speak! What brings you hither? May it be that, in some fashion or other, you want me?"

"Thank God, no, my friend," said D'Artagnan; "it is nothing of that kind, — I am rich and free."

"Rich!" exclaimed Aramis.

"Yes, rich for me; not for you, nor Porthos, understand. I have an income of about fifteen thousand livres."

Aramis looked at him suspiciously. He could not believe — particularly on seeing his old friend in such humble guise — that he had made so fine a fortune. Then D'Artagnan, seeing that the hour for explanations had come, related the story of his English adventures. During the narration he saw, a dozen times, the eyes of the prelate sparkle, and his slender fingers work convulsively. As to Porthos, it was not admiration he manifested for D'Artagnan, it was enthusiasm, it was delirium.

When D'Artagnan had finished, "Well!" said Aramis.

"Well!" said D'Artagnan, "you see that I have in England friends and property, in France a treasure. If your heart approves, I offer them to you. That is what I came here for."

However firm his look, he could not this time support that of Aramis. He therefore allowed his eye to stray towards Porthos, — like the sword which yields to too powerful a pressure and seeks another passage.

"At all events," said the bishop, "you have assumed a singular travelling costume, old friend."

"Frightful! I know it is. You may understand why I would not travel as a cavalier or a noble; since I became rich I am miserly."

"And you say, then, you came to Belle-Isle?" said Aramis, without transition.

"Yes," replied D'Artagnan; "I knew I should find you and Porthos there."

"Find me!" cried Aramis. "Me! During the year that I have been here I have not once crossed the sea."

"Oh," said D'Artagnan, "I did not know you were so domestic."

"Ah, dear friend, I must tell you that I am no longer the man of former times. Riding on horseback is unpleasant to me; the sea fatigues me. I am a poor ailing priest, always complaining, always grumbling, and inclined to the austerities which appear to accord with old age, — parleys with death. I abide, my dear D'Artagnan, I abide."

"Well, that is all the better, my friend; for we shall probably become neighbors."

"Bah!" said Aramis, with a degree of surprise he did not even seek to dissemble. "You, my neighbor!"

"*Mordioux!* yes."

"How so?"

"I am about to purchase some very profitable salt-mines, which are situated between Pirial and Le Croisic. Imagine, my friend, working at a clear profit of twelve per cent! Never any deficiency, never any idle expenses;

the ocean, faithful and regular, bringing every six hours its contingency to my coffers. I am the first Parisian who has dreamed of such a speculation. Do not divulge the matter, I beg of you, and in a short time we will communicate on the subject. I am to have three leagues of territory for thirty thousand livres."

Aramis darted a look at Porthos, as if to ask if all this were indeed true, if some snare were not concealed beneath this outward indifference. But soon, as if ashamed of having consulted this poor auxiliary, he collected all his forces for a fresh assault and a fresh defence. "I heard that you had had some difference with the Court," said he, "but that you had come out of it, as you know how to come out of everything, D'Artagnan, with the honors of war."

"I!" exclaimed the musketeer, with a great burst of laughter that could not conceal his embarrassment; for from these words, Aramis was not unlikely to be acquainted with his last relations with the king. — "I! oh, tell me all about that, pray, my dear Aramis?"

"Yes; it was related to me, a poor bishop lost in the middle of the moors, that the king had taken you as the confidant of his amours."

"With whom?"

"With Mademoiselle de Mancini."

D'Artagnan breathed freely again. "Ah! I don't say no to that," replied he.

"It appears that the king took you, one morning, over the bridge of Blois, to talk with his lady-love."

"That's true," said D'Artagnan. "And you know that, do you? Well, then, you must know that the same day I gave in my resignation."

"What, sincerely?"

"Nothing could be more sincere."

"It was then that you went to the Comte de la Fère's?"

"Yes."

"Afterwards to me?"

"Yes."

"And then to Porthos?"

"Yes."

"Was it in order to pay us a simple visit?"

"No; I did not know you were engaged, and I wished to take you with me into England."

"Yes, I understand; and then you executed alone, wonderful man! what you wanted to propose to us four to do. I suspected you had had something to do in that famous restoration, when I learned that you had been seen at King Charles's receptions, and that he spoke of you as a friend, or rather as a person to whom he was under an obligation."

"But how the devil could you learn all that?" demanded D'Artagnan, who began to fear that the investigations of Aramis would extend further than he wished.

"Dear D'Artagnan," said the prelate, "my friendship resembles, in a degree, the solicitude of that night-watch whom we have in the little tower of the mole, at the extremity of the quay. That brave man every night lights a lantern to direct the boats which come from sea. He is concealed in his watch-tower, and the fishermen do not see him; but he follows them with interest, he divines their presence, he calls them, he attracts them into the way to the port. I resemble this watcher; from time to time some news reaches me, and recalls to my remembrance all that I loved. Then I follow the friends of old days over the stormy ocean of the world, — I, a poor watcher, to whom God has kindly given the shelter of a watch-tower."

"Well, what did I do after I came from England?"

"Ah!" replied Aramis, "there you get out of my sight. I know nothing of you since your return, D'Artagnan; my sight grows thick. I regretted you did not think of me. I wept over your forgetfulness. I was wrong. I see you again; and it is a festival, a great festival, I assure you! How is Athos?"

"Very well, thank you."

"And our young pupil, Raoul?"

"He seems to have inherited the skill of his father, Athos, and the strength of his tutor, Porthos."

"And on what occasion have you been able to judge of that?"

"Eh! *mon Dieu!* the very day before my departure from Paris."

"Indeed! what was it?"

"Yes; there was an execution at the Grève, and in consequence of that execution, a riot. We happened, by accident, to be in the riot; and in this riot we were obliged to have recourse to our swords. And he did wonders."

"Bah! what did he do?"

"Why, in the first place, he threw a man out of the window as he would have thrown out a bale of cotton."

"Come, that's pretty well!" said Porthos.

"Then he drew, and cut and thrust away, as we fellows used to do in the good old times."

"And what was the cause of this riot?" inquired Porthos.

D'Artagnan noticed upon the face of Aramis a complete indifference to this question of Porthos. "Why," said he, fixing his eyes upon Aramis, "on account of two farmers of the revenues, friends of M. Fouquet, whom the king forced to disgorge their plunder, and then hanged."

A scarcely perceptible contraction of the prelate's brow showed that he had heard D'Artagnan's reply. "Oh!" said Porthos; "and what were the names of these friends of M. Fouquet?"

"Messieurs d'Eymeris and Lyodot," said D'Artagnan. "Do you know those names, Aramis?"

"No," said the prelate, disdainfully; "they sound like the names of financiers."

"Exactly; so they were."

"Oh! M. Fouquet allows his friends to be hanged, then?" cried Porthos.

"And why not?" said Aramis.

"Why, it seems to me —"

"If these culprits were hanged, it was by order of the king. Now, M. Fouquet, although superintendent of the finances, has not, I believe, the right of life and death."

"That may be," said Porthos; "but in the place of M. Fouquet —"

Aramis, fearing that Porthos was about to say something awkward, interrupted him: "Come, D'Artagnan!" said he, "this is quite enough about other people; let us talk a little about yourself."

"Of me you know all that I can tell you. On the contrary, let me hear a little about you, Aramis."

"I have told you, my friend. There is nothing of Aramis left in me."

"Nor of the Abbé d'Herblay even?"

"No, not even of him. You see a man whom God has taken by the hand, whom he has conducted to a position that he could never have dared even to hope for."

"God?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Yes."

"Well, that is strange! I have been told it was M. Fouquet."

"Who told you that?" cried Aramis, without being able, with all the power of his will, to prevent a slight flush coloring his cheeks.

"Why, Bazin, in faith!"

"The fool!"

"Indeed, I do not say he is a man of genius; but he told me so, and after him I repeat it to you."

"I have never seen M. Fouquet," replied Aramis, with a look as pure and calm as that of a virgin who has never told a lie.

"Well; but if you have seen him and even known him, there is no harm in that," replied D'Artagnan. "M. Fouquet is a very good sort of man."

"Humph!"

"A great politician."

Aramis made a gesture of indifference.

"An all-powerful minister."

"I hold only of the king and the Pope," said Aramis.

"*Dame!* listen then," said D'Artagnan, in the most natural tone imaginable. "I said that because everybody here swears by M. Fouquet. The plain is M. Fouquet's; the salt-mines I have bought are M. Fouquet's; the island in which Porthos studies topography is M. Fouquet's; the garrison is M. Fouquet's; the galleys are M. Fouquet's. I confess, then, that nothing would have surprised me in your enfeoffment, or rather in that of your diocese, to M. Fouquet. He is another master than the king, that is all; but quite as powerful as a king."

"Thank God! I am not enfeoffed to anybody; I belong to nobody, and am entirely my own," replied Aramis, who during this conversation followed with his eye every gesture of D'Artagnan, every glance of Porthos. But D'Artagnan was impassive and Porthos motionless. The thrusts aimed so skilfully were parried by an able adversary; not

one hit the mark. Nevertheless, both began to feel the fatigue of such a contest, and the announcement of supper was well received by everybody. Supper changed the course of conversation. Besides, they felt that, upon their guard as each one had been, they could neither of them boast of having the advantage. Porthos had understood nothing of it all. He had remained motionless, because Aramis had made him a sign not to stir. Supper, for him, was nothing but supper, but that was quite enough for Porthos. The supper, then, went off very well. D'Artagnan was in high spirits. Aramis exceeded himself in kind affability. Porthos ate like old Pelops. Their talk was of war, finance, the arts, and love. Aramis feigned astonishment at every word of politics D'Artagnan risked. This long series of surprises increased the mistrust of D'Artagnan, as the eternal mistrust of D'Artagnan provoked the suspicions of Aramis. At length D'Artagnan designedly let fall the name of Colbert; he had reserved that stroke for the last.

"Who is this Colbert?" asked the bishop.

"Oh, come," said D'Artagnan to himself, "that is too strong! We must be careful, *mordioux*! we must be careful."

D'Artagnan then gave Aramis all the information respecting Colbert he could desire. The supper, or rather the conversation, was prolonged till one o'clock in the morning, between D'Artagnan and Aramis. At ten o'clock precisely Porthos had fallen asleep in his chair, and snored like an organ. At midnight he woke up, and they sent him to bed. "Hum!" said he, "it seems to me that I was near falling asleep; but that was all very interesting, what you were talking about."

At one o'clock Aramis conducted D'Artagnan to the chamber destined for him, which was the best in the

episcopal palace. Two servants were placed at his command. "To-morrow, at eight o'clock," said he, taking leave of D'Artagnan, "we will take, if agreeable to you, a ride on horseback with Porthos."

"At eight o'clock!" said D'Artagnan; "so late?"

"You know that I require seven hours' sleep," said Aramis.

"That is true."

"Good-night, dear friend!" and he embraced the musketeer cordially.

D'Artagnan allowed him to depart; then, as soon as the door was closed, "Good!" said he, "at five o'clock I will be on foot."

Then, this determination being made, he went to bed, and "folded the pieces together," as people say.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH PORTHOS BEGINS TO BE SORRY FOR HAVING COME WITH D'ARTAGNAN.

SCARCELY had D'Artagnan extinguished his taper, when Aramis, who had watched through his curtains the last glimmer of light in his friend's apartment, traversed the corridor on tiptoe, and went to Porthos' room. The giant, who had been in bed nearly an hour and a half, lay grandly stretched out upon the eider-down. He was in that happy calm of the first sleep, which with Porthos was proof against the noise of bells or the report of cannon; his head swam in that soft oscillation which reminds us of the soothing motion of a ship. A moment more, and Porthos would have begun to dream. The door of the chamber opened softly under the delicate pressure of the hand of Aramis. The bishop approached the sleeper. A thick carpet deadened the sound of his steps; and besides, Porthos snored in a manner to drown all noise. Aramis laid one hand on the sleeper's shoulder. "Rouse!" said he; "wake up, my dear Porthos!" The voice of Aramis was soft and kind, but it conveyed more than a notice, — it conveyed an order. His hand was light, but it indicated a danger.

Porthos heard the voice and felt the hand of Aramis, even in the profoundness of his sleep. He started up. "Who goes there?" said he, in his giant's voice.

"Hush! hush! It is I," said Aramis.

"You, my friend? And what the devil do you wake me for?"

"To tell you that you must set off directly."

"Set off?"

"Yes."

"Where for?"

"For Paris."

Porthos bounded up in his bed, and then sank back again, fixing his great eyes in terror upon Aramis.

"For Paris?"

"Yes."

"A hundred leagues?" said he.

"A hundred and four," replied the bishop.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" sighed Porthos, lying down again, like those children who contend with their nurse to gain an hour or two more sleep.

"Thirty hours' riding," added Aramis, firmly. "You know there are good relays."

Porthos pushed out one leg, allowing a groan to escape him.

"Come, come, my friend!" insisted the prelate, with a sort of impatience.

Porthos drew the other leg out of the bed. "And is it absolutely necessary that I should go?" said he.

"Urgently necessary."

Porthos got upon his feet, and began to shake both walls and floors with steps like the weight of a marble statue.

"Hush! hush! for the love of Heaven, my dear Porthos!" said Aramis; "you will wake somebody."

"Ah! that's true," replied Porthos, in a voice of thunder, "I forgot that; but never fear, I will be careful;" and so saying, he let fall a belt loaded with his sword and pistols, and a purse, from which the crowns escaped with a ringing and prolonged noise. This noise made the

blood of Aramis boil, while it provoked in Porthos a formidable burst of laughter. "How droll that is!" said he, in the same voice

"Not so loud, Porthos, not so loud!"

"True, true!" and he lowered his voice a half-note.

"I was going to say," continued Porthos, "that it is droll that we are never so slow as when we are in a hurry, and never make so much noise as when we wish to be silent."

"Yes, that is true; but let us give the proverb the lie, Porthos; let us make haste, and hold our tongues"

"You see I am doing my best," said Porthos, drawing on his trunk hose.

"Very well."

"This seems to be something urgent?"

"It is more than that; it is serious, Porthos."

"Oh!"

"D'Artagnan has questioned you, has he not?"

"Questioned me?"

"Yes, at Belle-Isle?"

"Not the least in the world."

"Are you sure of that, Porthos?"

"*Parbleu!*"

"It is impossible. Recollect yourself."

"He asked me what I was doing, and I told him, — studying topography. I would have made use of another word which you employed one day."

"Of castrametation?"

"Yes, that's it; but I never could recollect it."

"All the better. What more did he ask you?"

"Who M. Gétard was."

"Next?"

"Who M. Jupenet was."

"He did not happen to see our plan of fortifications, did he?"

"Yes."

"The devil he did!"

"But don't be alarmed; I had rubbed out your writing with India-rubber. It was impossible for him to suppose you had given me any advice in those works."

"Ay; but our friend has very keen eyes."

"What are you afraid of?"

"I fear that everything is discovered, Porthos; the necessity is, then, to prevent a great misfortune. I have given orders to my people to close all the gates and doors. D'Artagnan will not be able to get out before daybreak. Your horse is ready saddled; you will gain the first relay; by five o'clock in the morning, you will have gone fifteen leagues. Come!"

Aramis then assisted Porthos to dress, piece by piece, with as much celerity as the most skilful *valet de chambre* could have done. Porthos, half confused, half stupefied, let him do as he liked, and was lost in excuses. When he was ready, Aramis took him by the hand, and led him, making him place his foot with precaution on every step of the stairs, preventing his running against door-frames, turning him this way and that, as if Aramis had been the giant and Porthos the dwarf. Soul set fire to and animated matter. A horse was waiting, ready saddled, in the courtyard. Porthos mounted. Then Aramis himself took the horse by the bridle, and led him over some dung spread in the yard with the evident intention of suppressing noise. He at the same time pinched the horse's nose, to prevent him from neighing. When they had arrived at the outer gate, drawing Porthos towards him, who was going off without even asking him what for, "Now, Friend Porthos, now; without drawing bridle, till you get to Paris," whispered he, in his ear: "eat on horseback, drink on horseback, sleep on horseback, but lose not a minute!"

"That 's enough; I will not stop."

"This letter to M. Fouquet; cost what it may, he must have it to-morrow before midday."

"He shall have it."

"And do not forget one thing, my friend."

"What is that?"

"That you are riding after your title of duke and peer."

"Oh! oh!" said Porthos, with his eyes sparkling; "I will do it in twenty-four hours in that case."

"Try to do so."

"Then let go the bridle; and forward, Goliath!"

Aramis did let go, — not the bridle, but the horse's nose. Porthos released his hand, clapped spurs to his horse, and the maddened animal set off at a gallop. As long as he could distinguish Porthos through the darkness, Aramis followed him with his eyes; then, when he was completely out of sight, re-entered the yard. Nothing had stirred in D'Artagnan's apartment. The valet placed on watch at the door had neither seen any light nor heard any noise. Aramis closed his door carefully, sent the lackey to bed, and quickly sought his own.

D'Artagnan really suspected nothing, therefore thought he had gained everything, when he awoke in the morning about half past four. He ran to the window in his shirt. The window looked out upon the court. Day was dawning. The court was deserted; the fowls, even, had not yet left their roosts. Not a servant appeared. All the doors were closed.

"Good! perfect quiet!" said D'Artagnan to himself. "Never mind; I am up first in the house. Let us dress; that will be so much done;" and D'Artagnan dressed himself. But this time he did not study to give to the costume of M. Agnan that plain and almost ecclesiastical

appearance he had affected before; he managed, by drawing his belt tighter, by buttoning his clothes in a different fashion, and by putting on his hat a little on one side, to restore to his person somewhat of that military character the absence of which had surprised Aramis. This being done, he made free, or rather affected to make free, with his host, and entered his chamber without ceremony.

Aramis was asleep, or feigned to be asleep. A large book lay open upon his night-desk; a wax-light was still burning above its silver tray. This was more than enough to prove to D'Artagnan the innocence of the prelate's night, and the good intentions of his waking. The musketeer did to the bishop precisely as the bishop had done to Porthos, —he tapped him on the shoulder. Evidently Aramis pretended to sleep; for instead of waking suddenly, he who slept so lightly, required a repetition of the summons.

"Ah! is that you?" said he, stretching his arms. "What an agreeable surprise! Faith! sleep had made me forget I had the happiness to possess you. What o'clock is it?"

"I do not know," said D'Artagnan, a little embarrassed. "Early, I believe. But, you know, that devil of a military habit of waking with the day sticks to me still."

"Do you wish that we should go out so soon?" asked Aramis. "It appears to me to be very early."

"Just as you like."

"I thought we had agreed not to get on horseback before eight."

"Possibly; but I had so great a wish to see you, that I said to myself, the sooner the better."

"And my seven hours' sleep?" said Aramis. "Take care! I had reckoned upon them; and what I lose of them I must make up."

"But it seems to me that formerly you were less of a sleeper than that, dear friend; your blood was alive, and you were never to be found in bed."

"And it is exactly on account of what you tell me, that I am so fond of being there now."

"Then you confess that it is not for the sake of sleeping that you have put me off till eight o' lock."

"I was afraid you would laugh at me if I told you the truth."

"Tell me, notwithstanding."

"Well, from six to eight, I am accustomed to perform my devotions."

"Your devotions?"

"Yes."

"I did not believe a bishop's exercises were so severe."

"A bishop, my friend, must sacrifice more to appearances than a simple clerk."

"*Mordioux!* Aramis, that is a word which reconciles me with your greatness. To appearances! That is a musketeer's word, in good truth! Hurrah for appearances, Aramis!"

"Instead of felicitating me upon it, pardon it me, D'Artagnan. It is a very mundane word which I have allowed to escape me."

"Must I leave you, then?"

"I want time for meditation, my friend."

"Well, I will leave you; but for the sake of that poor pagan called D'Artagnan, abridge them for once, I beg: I thirst for speech of you."

"Well, D'Artagnan, I promise you that within an hour and a half—"

"An hour and a half of devotions! Ah! my friend, be as reasonable with me as you can. Let me have the best bargain possible."

Aramis began to laugh. "Still agreeable, still young, still gay," said he. "You have come into my diocese to set me quarrelling with grace."

"Bah!"

"And you know well that I was never able to resist your seductions; you will cost me my salvation, D'Artagnan."

D'Artagnan bit his lips "Well," said he, "I will take the sin on my own head; favor me with one simple Christian sign of the cross and hurry through with one pater, and we will set out."

"Hush!" said Aramis, "we are no longer alone, I hear strangers coming up."

"Well, dismiss them."

"Impossible; I made an appointment with them yesterday. It is the principal of the college of the Jesuits, and the superior of the Dominicans."

"Your staff? Well, so be it."

"What are you going to do?"

"I am going to wake Porthos, and wait in his company till you have finished the conference."

Aramis did not stir; his brow remained unbent; he betrayed himself by no gesture or word. "Go," said he, as D'Artagnan advanced to the door. "By the way, do you know where Porthos sleeps?"

"No, but I can inquire."

"Take the corridor, and open the second door on the left."

"Thank you; *au revoir!*" and D'Artagnan departed in the direction pointed out by Aramis.

Ten minutes had not elapsed when he came back. He found Aramis seated between the superior of the Dominicans and the principal of the college of the Jesuits, exactly in the same situation in which he had found him

formerly in the inn at Crèvecœur. This company did not at all terrify the musketeer.

"What is it?" said Aramis, quietly. "You have, apparently, something to say to me, my friend."

"It is," replied D'Artagnan, fixing his eyes upon Aramis, — "it is that Porthos is not in his apartment."

"Indeed!" said Aramis, calmly; "are you sure?"

"*Pardieu!* I came from his chamber."

"Where can he be, then?"

"That is what I ask you."

"And have you not inquired?"

"Yes, I have."

"And what answer did you get?"

"That Porthos, often going out of a morning without saying anything to anybody, had probably gone out."

"What did you do then?"

"I went to the stables," replied D'Artagnan, carelessly.

"What for?"

"To see if Porthos had gone out on horseback."

"And had he?" interrogated the bishop.

"Well, there is a horse missing, — stall No. 5, Goliath."

All this dialogue, it may be easily understood, was not free from a certain affectation on the part of the musketeer, and a perfect complaisance on the part of Aramis.

"Oh! I see how it is," said Aramis, after having considered for a moment; "Porthos has gone out to give us a surprise."

"A surprise?"

"Yes. The canal which leads from Vannes to the sea abounds in teal and snipes; that is Porthos' favorite sport, and he will bring us back a dozen for our breakfast."

"Do you think so?" said D'Artagnan.

"I am sure of it. Where else can he have gone? I would lay a wager that he took a gun with him."

"That is possible," said D'Artagnan.

"Do one thing, my friend: get on horseback, and join him."

"You are right," said D'Artagnan; "I will."

"Do you wish me to accompany you?"

"No, thank you. Porthos is easily recognizable; I will inquire as I go along."

"Will you take an arquebuse?"

"Thank you."

"Order what horse you like to be saddled."

"The one I rode yesterday, on coming from Belle-Isle."

"So be it; use my establishment as your own."

Aramis rang, and gave orders to have the horse M. d'Artagnan had chosen saddled.

D'Artagnan followed the servant charged with the execution of this order. When about to pass through the door, the servant stepped aside to allow M. d'Artagnan to pass; and at that moment he caught the eye of his master. A contraction of the brow gave the intelligent spy to understand that all should be given to D'Artagnan that he wished. D'Artagnan got into the saddle, and Aramis heard the clatter of the hoofs on the pavement. An instant after, the servant returned.

"Well?" demanded the bishop.

"Monseigneur, he has followed the course of the canal, and is going towards the sea," said the servant.

"Very well!" said Aramis.

In fact, D'Artagnan, dismissing all suspicion, hastened towards the ocean, constantly hoping to see on the moors or on the beach the colossal form of his friend Porthos. He persisted in fancying that he could trace a horse's step in every puddle. Sometimes he imagined that he heard the report of a gun. This illusion lasted three

hours: during two of them he went forward in search of his friend; in the last he returned to the house.

"We must have passed each other," said he, "and I shall find the two good fellows waiting for me at table."

D'Artagnan was mistaken. he no more found Porthos at the palace than he had found him on the banks of the canal. Aramis was waiting for him at the top of the stairs, looking very much concerned

"Did my people not find you, my dear D'Artagnan?" cried he, as soon as he caught sight of the musketeer.

"No; did you send any one after me?"

"I am deeply concerned, my friend, deeply, to have induced you to make such a useless search; but about seven o'clock the almoner of St. Paterne came here. He had met Du Vallon, who was going away, and who, being unwilling to disturb anybody at the palace, had charged him to tell me that, fearing M. Gétard would play him some ill turn in his absence, he was going to take advantage of the morning tide to cross over to Belle-Isle."

"But, tell me, Goliath has not crossed the four leagues of sea, surely?"

"There are full six," said Aramis.

"That makes it less probable still."

"Therefore, my friend," said Aramis, with one of his blandest smiles, "Goliath is in the stable, well pleased, I will answer for it, that Porthos is no longer on his back."

In fact, the horse had been brought back from the relay by the direction of the prelate, whom no detail escaped. D'Artagnan appeared as well satisfied as possible with the explanation. He entered upon a rôle of dissimulation which agreed perfectly with the suspicions that arose more and more strongly in his mind. He breakfasted between the Jesuit and Aramis, having the

Dominican in front of him, and smiling particularly at the Dominican, whose jolly fat face pleased him much. The repast was long and sumptuous: excellent Spanish wine, fine Morbihan oysters, exquisite fish from the mouth of the Loire, enormous prawns from Paimbœuf, and delicious game from the moors constituted the principal part of it. D'Artagnan ate much, and drank but little. Aramis drank nothing, unless it was water. After breakfast, —

"You offered me an arquebuse," said D'Artagnan.

"I did."

"Lend it to me, then."

"Are you going shooting?"

"While waiting for Porthos, it is the best thing I can do, I think."

"Take which you like from the rack."

"Will you not come with me?"

"I would with great pleasure; but, alas! my friend, sporting is forbidden to bishops."

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, "I did not know that."

"Besides," continued Aramis, "I shall be busy till midday."

"I shall go alone, then?" said D'Artagnan.

"I am sorry to say you must; but be sure to come back to dinner."

"*Pardieu!* the eating at your house is too good to make me think of not coming back."

Thereupon D'Artagnan took leave of his host, bowed to the guests, and took his arquebuse, but, instead of shooting, went straight to the little port of Vannes. He looked back to see if anybody was following him, but saw no one. He chartered a little fishing-boat for twenty-five livres, and set off at half-past eleven, convinced that he had not been followed; and that was true. He had

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not been followed; but a Jesuit brother, stationed in the top of the steeple of his church and aided by an excellent glass, had not, since the morning, lost sight of one of his steps. At a quarter to twelve Aramis was informed that D'Artagnan was sailing towards Belle Isle.

The voyage was rapid; a good north northeast wind drove him towards the isle. As he gradually approached, his eyes were searching the coast. He looked to see if, upon the shore or upon the fortifications, the brilliant dress and vast stature of Porthos might be standing out against the slightly clouded sky. But his search was in vain, he landed without having seen anything, and learned from the first soldier interrogated by him that M. du Vallon had not yet returned from Vannes. Then, without losing an instant, D'Artagnan ordered his little boat to put its head towards Sarzeau. We know that the wind changes with the different hours of the day: it had gone round from north-northeast to southeast; the wind, then, was almost as good for the return to Sarzeau as it had been for the voyage to Belle-Isle. In three hours D'Artagnan had reached the Continent; two hours more sufficed for his ride to Vannes. In spite of the rapidity of his passage, what D'Artagnan endured of impatience and anger during that passage, only the deck of the vessel upon which he stamped backward and forward for three hours could relate to history. He made but one bound from the quay whereon he landed to the episcopal palace. He thought to terrify Aramis by the suddenness of his return; he wished to reproach him with his duplicity, — with reserve, but with sufficient spirit, nevertheless, to make him feel all the consequences of it, and force from him a part of his secret. He hoped, in short, — thanks to that force of expression which is to mysteries

what the charge with the bayonet is to redoubts, — to bring the mysterious Aramis to some manifestation or other. But he found in the vestibule of the palace the *valet de chambre*, who closed the passage, while smiling upon him with a sanctimonious air.

"Monseigneur!" cried D'Artagnan, endeavoring to put him aside with his hand. Staggered for an instant, the valet resumed his perpendicular.

"Monseigneur?" said he.

"Yes, to be sure; do you not know me, idiot?"

"Yes; you are the Chevalier d'Artagnan."

"Then let me pass."

"It is of no use."

"Why of no use?"

"Because his Greatness is not at home."

"What! his Greatness is not at home? where is he, then?"

"Gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes."

"Whither?"

"I don't know; but perhaps he tells Monsieur the Chevalier."

"And how? where? in what way?"

"In this letter which he gave me for Monsieur the Chevalier;" and the *valet de chambre* drew a letter from his pocket.

"Give it to me, then, you rascal!" said D'Artagnan, snatching it from his hand. "Oh, yes," continued he, at the first line, "yes, I understand;" and he read: —

DEAR FRIEND, — An affair of the most urgent nature calls me to a distant parish of my diocese. I hoped to see you again before I set out; but I lose that hope on thinking that you are going, no doubt, to remain two or three days at Belle-Isle,

with our dear Porthos. Amuse yourself as well as you can; but do not attempt to hold out against him at table. This is a counsel I might have given even to Athos, in his most brilliant and best days. Adieu, dear friend; believe that I regret greatly not having better and for a longer time profited by your excellent company.

"*Mordioux!*" cried D'Artagnan, "I am tricked. Ah! blockhead, brute, triple fool that I am! But let them laugh best who laugh last. Oh, duped, duped, like a monkey cheated with an empty nutshell!" and with a hearty blow bestowed upon the nose of the still grinning *valet de chambre*, he made all haste out of the episcopal palace. Furet, however good a trotter, was not equal to present circumstances. D'Artagnan therefore took the post, and chose a horse, which he made to understand, with good spurs and a light hand, that stags are not the most agile coursers in creation.

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH D'ARTAGNAN MAKES ALL SPEED, PORTHOS SNORES, AND ARAMIS COUNSELS.

From thirty to thirty-five hours after the events we have just related, as M. Fouquet, according to his custom, having forbidden interruption, was working in the cabinet of his house at St. Mandé, with which we are already acquainted, a carriage drawn by four horses streaming with sweat entered the court at full gallop. This carriage was probably expected; for three or four lackeys hastened to the door, which they opened. While M. Fouquet rose from his desk and ran to the window, a man got painfully out of the carriage, descending with difficulty the three steps, leaning upon the shoulders of the lackeys. He had scarcely uttered his name, when the lackey upon whom he was not leaning sprang up the steps and disappeared in the vestibule. This man went to inform his master; but he had no occasion to knock at the door, Fouquet was standing on the threshold.

"Monseigneur, the Bishop of Vannes," said he.

"Very well," replied his master.

Then, leaning over the baluster of the staircase, of which Aramis was beginning to ascend the first steps, "You, dear friend!" said he, "you, so soon!"

"Yes; I myself, Monsieur! but bruised, battered, as you see."

"Oh, my poor, dear friend!" said Fouquet, presenting him his arm, upon which Aramis leaned, while the servants drew back with respect.

"Bah!" replied Aramis, "it is nothing, since I am here. The principal thing was that I should get here, and here I am."

"Speak quickly," said Fouquet, closing the door of his cabinet behind Aramis and himself.

"Are we alone?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"No one can listen to us; no one can hear us?"

"Have no fear; nobody."

"Has M. du Vallon arrived?"

"Yes."

"And you have received my letter?"

"Yes. The affair is serious, apparently, since it necessitates your presence in Paris at a moment when your presence was so needed out there."

"You are right; it cannot be more serious."

"Thank you! thank you! What is it about? But, for God's sake! before anything else, take time to breathe, dear friend! You are so pale, you frighten me."

"I am really in great pain. But, for Heaven's sake, think nothing about me. Did M. du Vallon tell you nothing, when he delivered the letter to you?"

"No. I heard a great noise; I went to the window; I saw at the foot of the steps as it were a horseman of marble; I went down, he held the letter out to me, and his horse fell down dead."

"But he?"

"He fell with the horse; he was lifted up, and carried to an apartment. Having read the letter, I went up to him, in hopes of obtaining more ample information; but he was asleep, and after such a fashion that it was impossible to wake him. I took pity on him, and gave orders that his boots should be taken off, and that he should be left quite undisturbed."

"Very good; now, this is the question in hand, Monseigneur. You have seen M. d'Artagnan in Paris, have you not?"

"Certainly, and think him a man of intelligence, and even a man of heart, although he did bring about the death of our dear friends Lyodot and D'Eymeris."

"Alas! yes, I heard of that. At Tours I met the courier who was bringing me the letter from Gourville and the despatches from Pellisson. Have you seriously considered that event, Monsieur?"

"Yes."

"And in it you perceived a direct attack upon your sovereignty?"

"Do you believe it to be so?"

"Oh, yes, I think so."

"Well, I must confess that gloomy idea occurred to me also."

"Do not blind yourself, Monsieur, in the name of Heaven! Listen attentively to me. I return to D'Artagnan."

"I am all attention."

"Under what circumstances did you see him?"

"He came here for money."

"With what kind of order?"

"With an order from the king."

"Direct?"

"Signed by his Majesty."

"There, then! Well, D'Artagnan has been to Belle-Isle; he was disguised, he passed for some sort of a steward, charged by his master to purchase salt-mines. Now, D'Artagnan has no other master than the king; he came, then, sent by the king. He saw Porthos."

"Who is Porthos?"

"I beg your pardon, I made a mistake. He saw M. du

Vallon at Belle-Isle; and he knows, as well as you and I do, that Belle-Isle is fortified."

"And you think that the king sent him there?" said Fouquet, thoughtfully.

"I certainly do."

"And D'Artagnan, in the hands of the king, is a dangerous instrument?"

"The most dangerous imaginable."

"Then I formed a correct opinion of him at the first glance."

"How so?"

"I wished to attach him to myself."

"If you judged him to be the bravest, the most acute, and the most adroit man in France, you have judged correctly."

"He must be ours, then, at any price."

"D'Artagnan?"

"Is not that your opinion?"

"It may be my opinion, but you will never have him."

"Why?"

"Because we have allowed the time to go by. He was dissatisfied with the court; we should have profited by that. Since that, he has been over to England; there he powerfully assisted in the restoration, and gained a fortune; since then he has returned to the service of the king. Well, the reason of his return to the service of the king is that he has been well paid for the service."

"We will pay him still better, that is all."

"Oh, Monsieur, excuse me, D'Artagnan has a high sense of his word, and where that word is once engaged, it remains inviolable."

"What do you conclude, then?" said Fouquet, with great uneasiness.

"That, for the present, the principal thing is to parry a dangerous blow.'

"And how is it to be parried?"

"Listen. D'Artagnan will come and render an account to the king of his mission."

"Oh, we have time enough to think about that."

"How so?"

"You have a good start of him, I presume?"

"Nearly ten hours."

"Well, in ten hours —"

Aramis shook his weary head. "Look at those clouds which flit across the sky, at those swallows which cut the air. D'Artagnan moves more quickly than the cloud or the bird; D'Artagnan is the wind which carries them."

"Nonsense!"

"I tell you that man is something superhuman, Monsieur. He is of my age, and I have known him these five-and-thirty years."

"Well?"

"Well, listen to my calculation, Monsieur. I sent M. du Vallon off to you at two hours after midnight. M. du Vallon was eight hours in advance of me; when did M. du Vallon arrive?"

"About four hours ago."

"You see, then, that I gained four upon him; and yet Porthos is a stanch horseman, and has left on the road eight dead horses, whose bodies I passed one after another. I rode post fifty leagues. But I have the gout, the gravel, and what else I know not; so that fatigue kills me. I was obliged to dismount at Tours; since that, rolling along in a carriage, half dead, sometimes overturned, often drawn upon the sides and sometimes on the back of the carriage, always with four spirited horses at full gallop, I have arrived, — arrived, gaining

four hours upon Porthos. But, look you, D'Artagnan does not weigh three hundredweight, as Porthos does; D'Artagnan has not the gout and the gravel, as I have; he is not a horseman, he is a centaur. D'Artagnan, look you, set out for Belle Isle when I set out for Paris; and D'Artagnan, notwithstanding the ten hours' start that I have, will arrive within two hours after me."

"But, then, accidents?"

"He never meets with any accidents."

"Horses may fail him."

"He will run as fast as a horse."

"Good God! what a man!"

"Yes, he is a man whom I love and admire. I love him because he is good, great, and loyal; I admire him because he represents to me the culminating point of human powers: but while loving and admiring him, I fear him, and am on my guard against him. Now, then, I resume, Monsieur. In two hours D'Artagnan will be here: be beforehand with him. Go to the Louvre, and see the king before he sees D'Artagnan."

"What shall I say to the king?"

"Nothing; give him Belle-Isle."

"Oh, M. d'Herblay! M. d'Herblay!" cried Fouquet, "what projects are crushed all at once!"

"After one project has failed, there is always another which may lead to good; we should never despair. Go, Monsieur, and go quickly."

"But that garrison, so carefully chosen, the king will change it directly."

"That garrison, Monsieur, was the king's when it entered Belle-Isle; it is yours to-day. It will be the same with all garrisons after a fortnight's occupation. Let things go on, Monsieur. Do you see any inconvenience in having an army at the end of a year, instead of

one or two regiments? Do you not see that your garrison of to-day will make you partisans at La Rochelle, Nantes, Bordeaux, Toulouse, — everywhere they may be placed? Go to the king, Monsieur; go! Time flies; and D'Artagnan, while we are losing our time, is flying like an arrow along the highroad."

"M. d'Herblay, you know that each word from you is a germ which fructifies in my thoughts. I will go to the Louvre."

"Instantly, will you not?"

"I ask time only to change my dress."

"Remember that D'Artagnan has no need to pass through St. Mandé, but will go straight to the Louvre; that is cutting off an hour from the advance which remains to us."

"D'Artagnan may have everything except my English horses. I shall be at the Louvre in twenty-five minutes;" and without losing a second, Fouquet gave orders for his departure.

Aramis had only time to say to him, "Return as quickly as you go; for I shall await you impatiently."

Five minutes after, the superintendent was flying along the road to Paris. During this time Aramis desired to be shown the chamber in which Porthos was sleeping. At the door of Fouquet's cabinet he was folded in the arms of Pellisson, who had just heard of his arrival, and had left his office to see him. Aramis received, with that friendly dignity which he knew so well how to assume, Pellisson's caresses, which were as respectful as they were earnest; but, all at once, stopping on the landing-place, "What is that I hear up yonder?" he demanded.

There was, in fact, a hoarse, growling kind of noise, like the roar of a hungry tiger or an impatient lion.

"Oh, that is nothing," said Pellisson, smiling.

"Well; but — "

"It is M. du Vallon snoring."

"Of course," said Aramis; "no one but he is capable of making such a noise. Allow me, Pellisson, to inquire if he is in need of anything."

"And you will permit me to accompany you?"

"Oh, certainly!" and both entered the chamber. Porthos was stretched upon a bed, his face violet rather than red, his eyes swelled, his mouth wide open. The roaring which escaped from the deep cavities of his chest made the panes of the windows vibrate. To those intense and clearly defined muscles starting from his face, to his hair matted with sweat, to the violent heaving of his chin and shoulders, it was impossible to refuse a certain degree of admiration. Strength carried to that point is almost divinity. The herculean legs and feet of Porthos had, by swelling, burst his leather boots; all the strength of his huge body was converted into the rigidity of stone. Porthos moved no more than does the giant of granite which reclines upon the plains of Agrigentum. According to Pellisson's orders, his boots had been cut off, for no human power could have pulled them off. Four lackeys had tried in vain, pulling at them as if they were capstans; and yet all this did not awaken him. They had taken off his boots in fragments, and his legs had fallen back upon the bed. They had then cut off the rest of his clothes, and carried him to a bath, in which they let him lie a considerable time. They had put on him clean linen, and placed him in a well-warmed bed, — all this with an amount of exertion and movement which might have roused a dead man, but which did not make Porthos open an eye, or interrupt for a second his formidable snoring. Aramis on his part, with his hard

and nervous nature, armed with extraordinary courage, tried to outbrave fatigue, and employ himself with Gourville and Pellisson, but he fainted in the chair in which he had persisted in remaining. They took him up and carried him into an adjoining room, where repose upon a bed soon calmed his throbbing brain.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH M. FOUQUET ACTS.

In the mean time Fouquet was hastening to the Louvre, at the best speed of his English horses.

The king was employed with Colbert. All at once the king became thoughtful. The two sentences of death he had signed on mounting his throne sometimes recurred to his memory; they were two black spots which he saw with his eyes open, two spots of blood which he saw when his eyes were closed. "Monsieur," said he, all at once, to the intendant, "it sometimes seems to me that those two men you made me condemn were not very great culprits."

"Sire, they were picked out from the herd of the farmers of the revenue, which wanted decimating."

"Picked out by whom?"

"By necessity, Sire," replied Colbert, coldly.

"Necessity! a great word!" murmured the young king.

"A great goddess, Sire."

"They were devoted friends of the superintendent, were they not?"

"Yes, Sire; friends who would have given their lives for M. Fouquet."

"They have given them, Monsieur," said the king.

"That is true; but uselessly, by good luck, — which was not their intention."

"How much money had these men fraudulently obtained?"

"Ten millions, perhaps; of which six have been confiscated from their property."

"And is that money in my coffers?" said the king, with a certain air of repugnance.

"It is there, Sire; but this confiscation, while threatening M. Fouquet, has not touched him."

"You conclude, then, M. Colbert —"

"That if M. Fouquet has raised against your Majesty a troop of factious rioters to extricate his friends from punishment, he will raise an army when he shall have to extricate himself from punishment."

The king darted at his confidant one of those looks which resemble the ominous glare of a flash of lightning, one of those looks which illuminate the darkness of the deepest consciences. "I am astonished," said he, "that, thinking such things of M. Fouquet, you did not come to give me your counsels thereupon."

"Counsels upon what, Sire?"

"Tell me, in the first place, clearly and precisely, what you think, M. Colbert."

"Upon what subject, Sire?"

"Upon the conduct of M. Fouquet."

"I think, Sire, that M. Fouquet, not satisfied with attracting all the money to himself, as M. de Mazarin did, and by that means depriving your Majesty of a part of your power, still wishes to attract to himself all the friends of easy life and pleasures, — of what idlers call poetry, and politicians corruption. I think that, by holding the subjects of your Majesty in pay, he trespasses upon the royal prerogative, and cannot, if this continues so, be long in relegating your Majesty among the weak and obscure."

"How would you designate all these projects, M. Colbert?"

"The projects of M. Fouquet, Sire?"

"Yes."

"They are called crimes of high treason."

"And what is done to criminals guilty of high treason?"

"They are arrested, tried, and punished."

"You are quite sure that M. Fouquet has conceived the idea of the crime you impute to him?"

"I can say more, Sire; there is even a beginning of the execution of it."

"Well, then, I return to that which I was saying, M. Colbert."

"And you were saying, Sire —"

"Give me counsel."

"Pardon me, Sire; but, in the first place, I have something to add."

"Speak."

"An evident, palpable, material proof of treason."

"And what is that?"

"I have just learned that M. Fouquet is fortifying Belle Isle-en-Mer."

"Ah, indeed!"

"Yes, Sire."

"Are you sure?"

"Perfectly. Do you know, Sire, what soldiers there are at Belle Isle?"

"No, upon my word. Do you?"

"I am ignorant likewise, Sire; I should therefore propose to your Majesty to send somebody to Belle-Isle."

"Who?"

"Me, for instance."

"And what would you do at Belle-Isle?"

"Inform myself whether it is true that, after the example of the ancient feudal lords, M. Fouquet is fortifying his walls."

"And with what purpose would he do that?"

"With the purpose of defending himself some day against his king."

"But if it be thus, M. Colbert," said Louis, "we must immediately do as you say; M. Fouquet must be arrested."

"That is impossible."

"I thought I had already told you, Monsieur, that I suppressed that word in my service."

"The service of your Majesty cannot prevent M. Fouquet from being superintendent-general."

"Well?"

"And in consequence of holding that post, he has for him all the parliament, as he has all the army by his largesses, all literature by his favors, and all the nobility by his presents."

"That is to say, then, that I can do nothing against M. Fouquet?"

"Absolutely nothing, — at least at present, Sire."

"You are an unfruitful counsellor, M. Colbert."

"Oh, no, Sire, for I will not confine myself to pointing out the peril to your Majesty."

"Come, then, where shall we begin to undermine the Colossus? Let us see;" and his Majesty began to laugh with bitterness.

"He has grown great by money; kill him by money, Sire."

"If I were to deprive him of his charge?"

"A bad means, Sire."

"The good — the good, then?"

"Ruin him, Sire, I tell you."

"But how?"

"Occasions will not be wanting; take advantage of all occasions."

"Point them out to me."

"Here is one, first of all. His royal Highness Monsieur is about to be married; his nuptials must be magnificent. That is a good occasion for your Majesty to demand a million of M. Fouquet. M. Fouquet, who pays twenty thousand livres down when he need not pay more than five thousand, will easily find that million when your Majesty shall demand it."

"That is all very well; I will demand it," said Louis.

"If your Majesty will sign the order, I will have the money drawn myself;" and Colbert pushed a paper before the king, and handed him a pen.

At that moment the usher opened the door and announced Monsieur the Superintendent. Louis turned pale, Colbert let the pen fall, and drew back from the king, over whom he extended his black wings like a bad angel. The superintendent made his entrance like a true courtier, to whom a single glance was sufficient to make him appreciate a situation. This situation was not very encouraging for Fouquet, whatever might be the consciousness of his strength. The small black eye of Colbert dilated with envy, and the clear eye of Louis XIV. inflamed with anger indicated a pressing danger. Courtiers are, with regard to court rumors, like old soldiers, who distinguish through blasts of wind and the moaning of boughs the sound of the distant tread of an armed troop. They can, after having listened, tell pretty nearly how many men are marching, how many arms resound, how many cannon roll. Fouquet had then only to interrogate the silence which his arrival had produced; he found it big with menacing revelations.

The king allowed him time enough to advance as far as the middle of the chamber. His adolescent modesty constrained him to this momentary forbearance. Fouquet boldly seized the opportunity.

"Sire," said he, "I was impatient to see your Majesty."

"What for?" demanded Louis.

"To announce some good news to you."

Colbert, with a less imposing presence and less geniality of spirit, resembled Fouquet in many points. He had the same penetration, the same knowledge of men; he had, moreover, that great power of self-restraint which gives to hypocrites time to reflect and gather themselves up to take a spring. He guessed that Fouquet was going to meet the blow he was about to deal him. His eyes sparkled.

"What news?" asked the king. Fouquet placed a roll of papers on the table.

"Let your Majesty have the goodness to cast your eyes over this work," said he.

The king slowly unfolded the roll. "Plans?" said he.

"Yes, Sire."

"And what are these plans?"

"A new fortification, Sire."

"Ah!" said the king, "you occupy yourself with tactics and strategy, then, M. Fouquet?"

"I occupy myself with everything that may be useful to the reign of your Majesty," replied Fouquet.

"Beautiful drawings!" said the king, looking at the design.

"Your Majesty comprehends, without doubt," said Fouquet, bending over the paper; "here is the circle of the walls, here are the forts, there the advanced works."

"And what do I see here, Monsieur?"

"The sea."

"The sea all round?"

"Yes, Sire."

"And what is this place of which you show me the plan?"

"Sire, it is Belle-Isle-en-Mer," replied Fouquet, with simplicity.

At this word, at this name, Colbert made so marked a movement that the king turned round to enforce the necessity of reserve. Fouquet did not appear to be the least in the world concerned by the movement of Colbert, nor the king's signal.

"Monsieur," continued Louis, "you have, then, fortified Belle-Isle?"

"Yes, Sire; and I have brought the plan and the accounts to your Majesty," replied Fouquet. "I have expended sixteen hundred thousand livres in this operation."

"For what purpose?" replied Louis, coldly, having taken the initiative from a malicious look of the intendant.

"For an aim very easy to comprehend," replied Fouquet. "Your Majesty was not on good terms with Great Britain."

"Yes; but since the restoration of King Charles II., I have formed an alliance with him"

"That has taken place within a month's time, your Majesty; but it is more than six months since the fortifications of Belle-Isle were begun."

"Then they have become useless."

"Sire, fortifications are never useless. I fortified Belle-Isle against Messieurs Monk and Lambert, and all those London citizens who were playing at soldiers. Belle-Isle will be ready fortified against the Dutch, against whom either England or your Majesty cannot fail to make war."

The king was again silent, and looked askance at Colbert. "Belle-Isle, I believe," added Louis, "belongs to you, M. Fouquet?"

"No, Sire."

"To whom, then?"

"To your Majesty."

Colbert was seized with as much terror as if a gulf had opened beneath his feet. Louis started with admiration, either at the genius or at the devotion of Fouquet.

"Explain yourself, Monsieur," said he.

"Nothing more easy, Sire. Belle-Isle is one of my estates; I have fortified it at my own expense. But as nothing in the world can oppose a subject making an humble present to his king, I offer your Majesty the proprietorship of the estate, of which you will leave me the usufruct. Belle-Isle, as a place of war, ought to be occupied by the king. Your Majesty will be able, henceforth, to keep a safe garrison there."

Colbert almost sank down upon the floor. To keep himself from falling, he was obliged to hold by the columns of the wainscoting.

"This is a piece of great skill in the art of war that you have exhibited here, Monsieur," said Louis.

"Sire, the initiative did not come from me," replied Fouquet; "many officers have suggested it to me. The plans themselves have been made by one of the most distinguished engineers."

"His name?"

"M. du Vallon."

"M. du Vallon?" resumed Louis. "I do not know him. It is much to be lamented, M. Colbert," continued he, "that I do not know the names of the men of talent who do honor to my reign." While saying these words he turned towards Colbert. The latter felt himself crushed. The sweat flowed from his brow; not a single word presented itself to his lips; he was in unutterable tortures. "You will recollect that name," added Louis.

Colbert bowed, but was paler than his ruffles of Flemish lace.

Fouquet continued: "The masonries are of Roman mastic; the architects have composed it for me after the best examples of antiquity."

"And the cannon?" asked Louis.

"Oh, Sire, that concerns your Majesty; it did not become me to place cannon in my own house, until your Majesty had told me it was yours."

Louis began to waver, undetermined between the hatred which this so powerful man inspired him with, and the pity he felt for that other man, so cast down, who seemed to him the counterfeit of the former. But the consciousness of his kingly duty prevailed over the feelings of the man, and he stretched out his finger to the paper.

"It must have cost you a great deal of money to carry these plans into execution," said he.

"I believe I had the honor of telling your Majesty the amount?"

"Repeat it, if you please; I have forgotten it."

"Sixteen hundred thousand livres."

"Sixteen hundred thousand livres? You are enormously rich, Monsieur."

"It is your Majesty who is rich, since Belle-Isle is yours."

"Yes, thank you; but however rich I may be, M. Fouquet—" The king stopped.

"Well, Sire?" asked the superintendent.

"I foresee the moment when I shall want money."

"You, Sire? And at what moment, then?"

"To-morrow, for example."

"Will your Majesty do me the honor to explain yourself?"

"My brother is going to marry the Princess of England."

"Well, Sire?"

"Well, I ought to give the young princess a reception worthy of the granddaughter of Henry IV."

"That is but just, Sire."

"Then I shall want money."

"No doubt."

"I shall want —" Louis hesitated. The sum that he was going to demand was the same that he had been obliged to refuse Charles II. He turned towards Colbert, that he might give the blow.

"I shall want, to-morrow —" repeated he, looking at Colbert.

"A million," said the latter, bluntly, delighted to take his revenge.

Fouquet turned his back on the intendant to listen to the king. He did not turn round at all, but waited till the king repeated, or rather murmured, "A million."

"Oh, Sire," replied Fouquet, disdainfully, "a million! What will your Majesty do with a million?"

"It appears to me, nevertheless —" said Louis.

"That is not more than is spent at the nuptials of one of the most petty princes of Germany."

"Monsieur!"

"Your Majesty must have two millions at least. The horses alone will run away with five hundred thousand livres. I shall have the honor of sending your Majesty sixteen hundred thousand livres this evening."

"How!" said the king, "sixteen hundred thousand livres?"

"Look, Sire," replied Fouquet, without even turning towards Colbert, "I know that that wants four hundred thousand livres of the two millions. But this Monsieur who is intendant," pointing over his shoulder to Colbert behind him, who if possible became still paler, "has in his coffers nine hundred thousand livres of mine."

The king turned round to look at Colbert.

"But —" said the latter.

"Monsieur," continued Fouquet, still speaking indirectly to Colbert, — "Monsieur received, a week ago, sixteen hundred thousand livres; he has paid a hundred thousand livres to the Guards, seventy-five thousand livres to the hospitals, twenty-five thousand to the Swiss, a hundred and thirty thousand for stores, a thousand for arms, ten thousand for incidental expenses. I do not err, then, in reckoning upon nine hundred thousand livres that are left." Then half turning towards Colbert, like a disdainful head of office towards his inferior, "Take care, Monsieur," said he, "that those nine hundred thousand livres be remitted to his Majesty this evening, in gold."

"But," said the king, "that will make two million five hundred thousand livres."

"Sire, the five hundred thousand livres over may serve as pocket-money for his royal Highness. You understand, M. Colbert, this evening, before eight o'clock."

With these words, bowing respectfully to the king, the superintendent made his exit backward, without honoring with a single look the envious man whose head he had just half shaved.

Colbert tore his Flemish point to pieces in his rage, and bit his lips till they bled.

Fouquet had not passed the door of the cabinet, when an usher, passing by him, called out, "A courier from Bretagne for his Majesty."

"M. d'Herblay was right," murmured Fouquet, pulling out his watch; "an hour and fifty-five minutes. It was time!"

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH D'ARTAGNAN AT LAST PLACES HIS HAND UPON HIS CAPTAIN'S COMMISSION.

THE reader guesses beforehand whom the usher named in announcing the messenger from Bretagne. This messenger was easily recognized. It was D'Artagnan, — his clothes dusty, his face inflamed, his hair dripping with sweat, his legs stiff; he lifted his feet painfully the height of each step, upon which resounded the ring of his bloody spurs. He perceived, in the doorway through which he was passing, the superintendent coming out. Fouquet bowed with a smile to him who an hour before was bringing him ruin and death. D'Artagnan found, in his goodness of heart and in his inexhaustible vigor of body, enough presence of mind to remember the kind reception this man had given him, and bowed also, much more, however, from benevolence and compassion than from respect. He felt upon his lips the word which had so many times been repeated to the Duc de Guise: "Fly!" But to pronounce that word would have been to betray his cause; to speak that word in the cabinet of the king and before an usher, would have been to ruin himself gratuitously without saving anybody. D'Artagnan, then, contented himself with bowing to Fouquet, and entered.

At this moment the king was fluctuating between the joy the last words of Fouquet had given him, and his pleasure at the return of D'Artagnan. Without being a courtier, D'Artagnan had a glance as sure and rapid as

if he had been one. He read, on his entrance, heart-consuming humiliation on the countenance of Colbert. He even heard the king say these words to him: "Ah, M. Colbert, you have, then, nine hundred thousand livres belonging to the superintendent?" Colbert, choking, bowed, but made no reply. All this scene entered into the mind of D'Artagnan through his eyes and ears at once.

The first word of Louis XIV. to his musketeer, as if he wished it to be in contrast with what he had just been saying, was a kind "Good-day;" his second word was to send away Colbert.

The latter left the king's cabinet livid and tottering, while D'Artagnan twisted up the ends of his mustache.

"I love to see one of my servants in this disorder," said the king, admiring the martial stains upon the clothes of his envoy.

"I thought, Sire, my presence at the Louvre was sufficiently urgent to excuse my coming thus before you."

"You bring me great news, then, Monsieur?" asked the king, smiling.

"Sire, the thing is this, in two words: Belle-Isle is fortified, admirably fortified. Belle-Isle has a double *enceinte*, a citadel, two detached forts; its port contains three corsairs, and the side batteries only wait for their cannon."

"I know all that, Monsieur," replied the king.

"What! your Majesty knows all that?" replied the musketeer, stupefied.

"I have the plan of the fortifications of Belle-Isle," said the king.

"Your Majesty has the plan?"

"Here it is."

"It is really it, Sire; and I saw a similar one on the

spot." The brow of D'Artagnan became clouded. "Ah! I understand all. Your Majesty has not trusted to me alone, but has sent some other person," said he, in a reproachful tone.

"Of what importance is the manner, Monsieur, in which I have learned what I know, so that I know it?"

"Be it so, Sire," replied the musketeer, without seeking even to conceal his dissatisfaction; "but I must be permitted to say to your Majesty that it is not worth while to make me use such speed, to risk twenty times breaking my neck, if you are to salute me with such intelligence on my arrival. Sire, when people are not trusted or are deemed insufficient, they should not be employed;" and D'Artagnan, with a movement quite military, stamped with his foot, and left upon the floor dust stained with blood.

The king looked at him, inwardly enjoying his first triumph. "Monsieur," said he, at the expiration of a minute, "not only is Belle-Isle known to me, but, still further, Belle-Isle belongs to me."

"That is well, that is well, Sire! I ask no more," replied D'Artagnan. "My discharge!"

"What! your discharge?"

"Certainly! I am too proud to eat the bread of the king without gaining it, or rather by gaining it badly. My discharge, Sire!"

"Oh, oh!"

"My discharge, or I shall take it."

"You are angry, Monsieur?"

"I have reason, *mordioux!* I am thirty-two hours in the saddle, I ride night and day, I perform prodigies of speed, I arrive stiff as the corpse of a man who has been hanged; and another arrives before me! Come, Sire, I am a fool! My discharge, Sire!"

"M. d'Artagnan," said Louis, resting his white hand upon the dusty arm of the musketeer, "what I have just told you will not at all affect what I promised you. A promise given must be fulfilled," and the young king, going straight to his table, opened a drawer and took out a folded paper. "Here is your commission of captain of Musketeers; you have won it, M. d'Artagnan."

D'Artagnan opened the paper eagerly, and looked at it twice. He could scarcely believe his eyes.

"And this commission is given you," continued the king, "not only on account of your journey to Belle-Isle, but also for your brave intervention at the Place de Grève. There, likewise, you served me valiantly."

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, his self command being unable to prevent a certain redness mounting up to his eyes, "you know that also, Sire?"

"Yes, I know it."

The king possessed a piercing glance and an infallible judgment, when it was his object to read a conscience. "You have something to say," said he to the musketeer, "something to say which you do not say. Come, speak freely, Monsieur; you know that I told you, once for all, that you are to be quite frank with me."

"Well, Sire! what I have to say is this, that I would prefer being made captain of Musketeers for having charged a battery at the head of my company or taken a city, than for causing two wretches to be hanged."

"Is this quite true that you tell me?"

"And why should your Majesty suspect me of dissimulation, I ask?"

"Because I know you well, Monsieur; you cannot repent of having drawn your sword for me."

"Well, in that your Majesty is mistaken, and greatly. Yes, I do repent of having drawn my sword, on account of

the results that action produced; the poor men who were hanged, Sire, were neither your enemies nor mine, and they could not defend themselves."

The king preserved silence for a moment. "And your companion, M. d'Artagnan, does he partake of your repentance?"

"My companion?"

"Yes; you were not alone, I have been told."

"Alone, where?"

"At the Place de Grève"

"No, Sire, no!" said D'Artagnan, blushing at the idea that the king might have a suspicion that he, D'Artagnan, had wished to appropriate to himself the glory that belonged to Raoul; "no, *mordioux!* and as your Majesty says, I had a companion, and a good companion too."

"A young man?"

"Yes, Sire, a young man. Oh! your Majesty must accept my compliments; you are as well informed of things out of doors as of things within. It is M. Colbert who makes all these fine reports to the king."

"M. Colbert has said nothing but good of you, M. d'Artagnan, and he would have met with a bad reception if he had come to tell me anything else."

"That is fortunate."

"But he also said much good of that young man."

"And with justice," said the musketeer.

"In short, it appears that this young man is a hero," said Louis, in order to quicken the sentiment which he mistook for envy.

"A hero! Yes, Sire," repeated D'Artagnan, delighted on his part to direct the king's attention to Raoul.

"Do you know his name?"

"Well, I think —"

"You know him, then?"

"I have known him nearly five-and-twenty years, Sire."

"Why, he is scarcely twenty-five years old!" cried the king.

"Well, then, Sire, I have known him ever since his birth."

"Do you affirm that?"

"Sire," said D'Artagnan, "your Majesty questions me with a mistrust in which I recognize another character than your own. M. Colbert, who has so well informed you, has he then forgotten to tell you that this young man is the son of my most intimate friend?"

"The Vicomte de Bragelonne?"

"Certainly, Sire. The father of the Vicomte de Bragelonne is M. le Comte de la Fère, who so powerfully assisted in the restoration of King Charles II. Bragelonne is of a valiant race, Sire."

"Then he is the son of that nobleman who came to me, or rather to M. de Mazarin, on the part of King Charles II., to offer us his alliance?"

"Exactly, Sire."

"And the Comte de la Fère is also a hero, is he not?"

"Sire, he is a man who has drawn his sword more times for the king your father, than there are at present days in the happy life of your Majesty."

It was Louis XIV. who now bit his lip in his turn.

"That is well, M. d'Artagnan, very well! And M. le Comte de la Fère is your friend, you say?"

"For about forty years; yes, Sire. Your Majesty may see that I do not speak to you of yesterday."

"Would you be glad to see this young man, M. d'Artagnan?"

"Delighted, Sire."

The king touched his bell, and an usher appeared.

"Call M. de Bragelonne," said the king.

"Ah! he is here?" said D'Artagnan.

"He is on guard to-day, at the Louvre, with the company of the gentlemen of Monsieur the Prince."

The king had scarcely ceased speaking, when Raoul presented himself, and on seeing D'Artagnan smiled on him with that charming smile which is found only upon the lips of youth.

"Come, come," said D'Artagnan, familiarly, to Raoul, "the king will allow you to embrace me; only tell his Majesty you thank him."

Raoul bowed so gracefully that Louis, to whom all superior qualities were pleasing when they did not imply anything against his own, admired his beauty, strength, and modesty.

"Monsieur," said the king, addressing Raoul, "I have asked Monsieur the Prince to be kind enough to give you up to me; I have received his reply, and you belong to me from this morning. Monsieur the Prince was a good master, but I hope you will not lose by the change."

"Yes, yes, Raoul, be satisfied; the king has some good in him," said D'Artagnan, who had fathomed the character of Louis, and who played with his self-love within certain limits; always observing, be it understood, the proprieties, and flattering even when he appeared to be bantering.

"Sire," said Bragelonne, with a voice soft and musical, and with the natural and easy elocution he inherited from his father, — "Sire, it is not from to-day only that I belong to your Majesty."

"Oh! I know," said the king; "you mean your enterprise of the Place de Grève. That day you were truly mine, Monsieur."

"Sire, it is not of that day I would speak; it would not become me to refer to so paltry a service in the

presence of a man like M. d'Artagnan. I would speak of a circumstance which created an epoch in my life, and which consecrated me, from the age of sixteen, to the devoted service of your Majesty."

"Ah!" said the king, "and what is that circumstance? Tell me, Monsieur."

"This is it, Sire. When I was setting out on my first campaign,— that is to say, to join the army of Monsieur the Prince, — M. le Comte de la Fère came to conduct me as far as St. Denis, where the remains of King Louis XIII. await, upon the lowest steps of the funereal basilica, a successor, — whom God will not send him, I hope, for many years. Then he made me swear, upon the ashes of our masters, to serve royalty, represented by you, — incarnate in you, Sire, — to serve it in word, in thought, and in deed. I swore; and God and the dead were witnesses to my oath. During ten years, Sire, I have not so often as I desired had occasion to keep it I am a soldier of your Majesty, and nothing else; and on calling me nearer to you, I do not change my master, I only change my garrison."

Raoul was silent, and bowed. Louis still listened after he had done speaking.

"*Mordioux!*" cried D'Artagnan, "that is well spoken, is it not, your Majesty! A good race! a noble race!"

"Yes," murmured the agitated king, without, however, daring to manifest his emotion, for it had no other cause than the contact with a nature eminently noble, — "yes, Monsieur, you say truly; wherever you were, you were the king's. But in changing your garrison, believe me, you will find an advancement of which you are worthy."

Raoul saw that this ended what the king had wished to say to him; and with the perfect tact which characterized his refined nature, he bowed and retired.

"Is there anything else, Monsieur, of which you have to inform me?" said the king, when he found himself again alone with D'Artagnan.

"Yes, Sire; and I kept that news for the last, for it is sad, and will clothe European royalty in mourning."

"What do you tell me?"

"Sire, in passing through Blois, a word, a sad word, echoed from the palace, struck my ear."

"In truth you terrify me, M. d'Artagnan!"

"Sire, this word was uttered to me by an outrider, who wore crape on his arm."

"My uncle, Gaston of Orleans, perhaps?"

"Sire, he has rendered his last sigh."

"And I was not told of it!" cried the king, whose royal susceptibility saw an insult in the absence of this intelligence.

"Oh, do not be angry, Sire!" said D'Artagnan. "Neither the couriers of Paris, nor the couriers of the whole world, can travel like your servant. The courier from Blois will not be here these two hours; and he rides well, I assure you, seeing that I passed him only on the other side of Orleans."

"My uncle Gaston," murmured Louis, pressing his hand to his brow, and compressing in those three words all that his memory recalled of that name and all his mingled feelings.

"Eh! yes, Sire, it is thus," said D'Artagnan, philosophically replying to the royal thought, "that the past flies away."

"That is true, Monsieur, that is true; but there remains for us, thank God! the future, and we will try to make it not too dark."

"I feel confidence in your Majesty on that head," said D'Artagnan, bowing; "and now —"

"You are right, Monsieur; I had forgotten the hundred and ten leagues you have just ridden. Go, Monsieur, take care of one of the best of soldiers; and when you have rested a little, come and place yourself at my orders."

"Sire, absent or present, I always am so."

D'Artagnan bowed and retired. Then, as if he had only come from Fontainebleau, he quickly traversed the Louvre to rejoin Bragelonne.

CHAPTER VII.

A LOVER AND A MISTRESS.

While the wax-lights were burning in the castle of Blois around the inanimate body of Gaston of Orleans, that last representative of the past; while the people of the city were composing his epitaph, which was far from being a panegyric; while Madame the dowager, no longer remembering that in her young days she had loved that senseless corpse to such a degree as to flee from the paternal palace for his sake, was making, within twenty paces of the funeral apartment, her little calculations of interest and her little sacrifices of pride, — other interests and other prides were in agitation in all the parts of the castle into which a living soul could penetrate. Neither the lugubrious sound of the bells, nor the voices of the chanters, nor the splendor of the wax lights through the windows, nor the preparations for the funeral, had the power to divert the attention of two persons, placed at a window of the inner court, — a window which we are already acquainted with, and which lighted a chamber forming part of what were called the little apartments. For the rest, a joyous beam of sunlight, — for the sun appeared to care very little for the loss France had just suffered, — a sunbeam, we say, descended upon them, drawing perfumes from the neighboring flowers, and animating the walls themselves. These two persons, so occupied, not by the death of the duke, but by the conversation which was the consequence of that death, — these two persons were a young woman and a young man. The latter personage —

a man of from twenty-five to twenty six years of age, with a mien sometimes lively and sometimes sly, making good use of two immensely large eyes, shaded with long eyelashes — was short of stature and brown of skin; he smiled with an enormous but well-furnished mouth, and his pointed chin, which appeared to enjoy a mobility which Nature does not ordinarily grant to that portion of the countenance, approached from time to time very lovingly towards his companion, who, we must say, did not always draw back so rapidly as strict propriety might require. The young girl, — we know her, for we have already seen her, at that very same window, by the light of that same sun, — the young girl presented a singular mixture of slyness and reflection. She was charming when she laughed, beautiful when she became serious; but let us hasten to say she was more frequently charming than beautiful. The two persons appeared to have attained the culminating point of a discussion half bantering, half serious.

"Now, M. Malicorne," said the young girl, "does it, at length, please you that we should talk reasonably?"

"You believe that that is very easy, Mademoiselle Aure,' replied the young man. "To do what we like, when we can only do what we can — "

"Good! there he is, bewildered in his phrases."

"Who, I?"

"Yes, you; leave that lawyers' logic, my dear."

"Another impossibility; I am a clerk, Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"And I am a lady, M. Malicorne."

"Alas! I know it well, and you overwhelm me by the distance; so I will say no more to you."

"Well, but, no, I don't overwhelm you; say what you have to tell me, — say it, I insist upon it."

"Well, I obey you."

"That is truly fortunate."

"Monsieur is dead."

"Ah, *peste!* there's news! And where do you come from, to be able to tell us that?"

"I come from Orleans, Mademoiselle."

"And is that all the news you bring?"

"Oh, no; I come to tell you that Madame Henrietta of England is coming to marry his Majesty's brother."

"Indeed, Malicorne, you are insupportable with your news of the last century. Now, mind, if you persist in this bad habit of laughing at people, I will have you turned out."

"Oh!"

"Yes; for really you exasperate me."

"There, there! Patience, Mademoiselle!"

"You want to make yourself of consequence; I know well enough why."

"Tell me, and I will answer you frankly yes, if the thing be true."

"You know that I am anxious to have that commission of lady of honor, which I have been foolish enough to ask of you, and you do not use your influence."

"Who, I?" Malicorne cast down his eyes, clasped his hands, and assumed his cunning air. "And what credit can the poor clerk of a public prosecutor have, pray?"

"Your father has not twenty thousand livres a year for nothing, M. Malicorne."

"A provincial fortune, Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"Your father is not in the secrets of Monsieur the Prince for nothing."

"An advantage which is confined to lending Monseigneur money."

"In a word, you are not the most cunning young fellow in the province for nothing?"

"You flatter me."

"Who? I?"

"Yes, you."

"How so?"

"Since I maintain that I have no influence, and you maintain that I have."

"Well, then, my commission?"

"Well, your commission?"

"Shall I have it, or shall I not?"

"You shall have it."

"Ay, but when?"

"When you like."

"Where is it, then?"

"In my pocket."

"How! in your pocket?"

"Yes;" and with a smile Malicorne drew from his pocket a letter, upon which Montalais seized as a prey, and which she read with avidity.

As Montalais read, her face brightened. "Malicorne," exclaimed she, after having read it, "in truth, you are a good lad."

"What for, Mademoiselle?"

"Because you might have been paid for this commission, and you have not been." She burst into a loud laugh, thinking to put the clerk out of countenance; but Malicorne sustained the attack bravely.

"I do not understand you," said he. It was now Montalais who was disconcerted in her turn. "I have declared my sentiments to you," continued Malicorne. "You have told me three times, laughing all the while, that you did not love me; you have kissed me once without laughing, and that is all I want."

"All?" said the proud and coquettish Montalais, in a tone through which wounded pride was visible.

"Absolutely all, Mademoiselle," replied Malicorne.

"Ah!" and this monosyllable indicated as much anger as the young man might have expected gratitude. He shook his head calmly.

"Listen, Montalais," said he, without heeding whether that familiarity pleased his mistress or not; "let us not dispute about that."

"And why not?"

"Because during the year in which I have known you, you might have had me turned out of doors twenty times if I did not please you."

"Indeed; and on what account should I have had you turned out?"

"Because I have been sufficiently impertinent for that."

"Oh, yes, that's true."

"You see plainly that you are forced to avow it," said Malicorne.

"M. Malicorne!"

"Don't let us be angry; if you have retained me, then, it has not been without cause."

"It is not, at least, because I love you," cried Montalais.

"Granted. I will even say that, at this moment, I am certain that you execrate me."

"Oh, you have never spoken so truly."

"Well, on my part, I detest you."

"Ah, I will remember that."

"Do! You find me brutal and foolish; on my part I find you with a harsh voice, and your face distorted with anger. At this moment you would allow yourself to be thrown out of that window rather than allow me to kiss the tip of your finger; I would precipitate myself from the top of the balcony rather than touch the hem of your

robe. But in five minutes you will love me, and I shall adore you. Oh, it is just so!"

"I doubt it."

"And I swear it."

"Coxcomb!"

"And then, that is not the true reason. You stand in need of me, Aure, and I of you. When it pleases you to be gay, I make you laugh; when it suits me to be loving, I look at you. I have given you a commission of lady of honor which you wished for; you will give me, presently, something I wish for."

"I shall?"

"Yes, you will. But at this moment, my dear Aure, I declare to you that I wish for absolutely nothing; so be at ease."

"You are a frightful man, Malicorne; I was going to rejoice at getting this commission, and thus you take away all my joy."

"Good; there is no time lost, — you will rejoice when I am gone."

"Go, then; and after —"

"So be it; but, in the first place, a piece of advice."

"What is it?"

"Keep your good humor; you are ugly when you pout."

"Boor!"

"Come, let us tell the truth to each other, while we are about it."

"Oh, Malicorne! Bad-hearted man!"

"Oh, Montalais! Ungrateful girl!"

The young man leaned his elbow upon the window-frame. Montalais took a book and opened it. Malicorne stood up, brushed his hat with his sleeve, and smoothed down his black doublet. Montalais, though pretending to read, looked at him out of the corner of her eye.

"Good!" cried she, quite furious; "he has assumed his respectful air, and he will sulk for a week."

"A fortnight, Mademoiselle," said Malicorne, bowing.

Montalais raised her little clenched fist. "Monster!" said she; "oh, if I were a man!"

"What would you do to me?"

"I would strangle you."

"Ah! very well, then," said Malicorne; "I believe I begin to desire something."

"And what do you desire, Monsieur Demon? — that I should lose my soul from anger!"

Malicorne was twirling his hat respectfully between his fingers; but all at once he let fall his hat, seized the young girl by the shoulders, pulled her towards him, and applied to her lips two other very warm lips for a man pretending to so much indifference. Aure would have cried out, but the cry was stifled in the kiss. Nervous and irritated, the young girl pushed Malicorne against the wall.

"Good!" said Malicorne, philosophically; "that's enough for six weeks. Adieu, Mademoiselle! Accept my very humble salutation;" and he made three steps towards the door.

"Well! no, you shall not go!" cried Montalais, stamping with her little foot. "Stay where you are! I order you!"

"You order me?"

"Yes; am I not mistress?"

"Of my heart and soul, without doubt."

"A pretty property, in faith! The soul is silly and the heart hard."

"Beware, Montalais, I know you," said Malicorne; "you are going to fall in love with your humble servant."

"Well, yes!" said she, hanging round his neck with

childish indolence rather than with loving abandonment, — "well, yes! for I must thank you, at least."

"And for what?"

"For the commission; is it not my whole future?"

"And all mine."

Montalais looked at him. "It is frightful," said she, "that one can never guess whether you are speaking seriously or not."

"I cannot speak more seriously. I was going to Paris, — you are going there, — we are going there."

"And so it is for that motive only you have served me, selfish fellow!"

"What would you have me say, Aure? I cannot live without you."

"Well, in truth, it is just so with me; you are, nevertheless, it must be confessed, a very bad-hearted young man."

"Aure, my dear Aure, take care! if you take to calling names again, you know the effect they produce upon me, and I shall adore you;" and so saying, Malicorne drew the young girl a second time towards him. But at that instant a step resounded on the staircase. The young people were so close that they would have been surprised in each other's arms if Montalais had not violently pushed Malicorne, who backed against the door, just then opening. A loud cry, followed by angry reproaches, was immediately heard. It was Madame de Saint-Remy who uttered the cry and proffered the angry words. The unlucky Malicorne almost crushed her between the wall and the door through which she was coming.

"It is again that good-for-nothing!" cried the old lady. "Always here!"

"Ah, Madame!" replied Malicorne, in a respectful tone; "it is eight long days since I was here."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH AT LENGTH THE TRUE HEROINE OF THIS HISTORY APPEARS.

Behind Madame de Saint-Remy came up Mademoiselle de la Vallière. She heard the explosion of maternal anger; and as she divined the cause of it, she entered the room trembling, and perceived the unlucky Malicorne, whose woful countenance would have softened or set laughing whoever might have observed it coolly. He had promptly intrenched himself behind a large chair, as if to avoid the first attacks of Madame de Saint-Remy. He had no hopes of prevailing with words, for she spoke louder than he, and without stopping; but he reckoned upon the eloquence of his gestures. The old lady would neither listen to nor see anything; Malicorne had long been one of her antipathies. But her anger was too great not to overflow from Malicorne to his accomplice. Montalais had her turn.

"And you, Mademoiselle, — you may be certain that I shall inform Madame of what is going on in the apartment of one of her ladies of honor."

"Oh, dear mother!" cried Mademoiselle de la Vallière, "for mercy's sake, spare — "

"Hold your tongue, Mademoiselle, and do not uselessly trouble yourself to intercede for unworthy subjects. That a virtuous girl like you should be subjected to a bad example is, certainly, a misfortune great enough; but

that you should sanction it by your indulgence is what I will not allow."

"But, in truth," said Montalais, rebelling again, "I do not know under what pretence you treat me thus. I am doing no harm, I suppose?"

"And that great good-for-nothing, Mademoiselle," resumed Madame de Saint-Remy, pointing to Malicorne, "is he here to do any good, I ask you?"

"He is here for neither good nor harm, Madame; he comes to see me, — that is all."

"That is all very well, all very well!" said the old lady. "Her royal Highness shall be informed of it, and she will judge."

"At all events," replied Montalais, "I do not see why it should be forbidden that M. Malicorne should have intentions towards me, if his intentions are honorable."

"Honorable intentions with such a face!" cried Madame de Saint-Remy.

"I thank you, in the name of my face, Madame," said Malicorne.

"Come, my daughter, come!" continued Madame de Saint-Remy; "we will go and inform Madame that at the very moment when she is weeping for her husband, at the moment when we are all weeping for a master in this old castle of Blois, the abode of grief, there are people who amuse themselves and make merry."

"Oh!" exclaimed both the accused, with one voice.

"A maid of honor! a maid of honor!" cried the old lady, lifting her hands towards heaven.

"Well, that is where you are mistaken, Madame," said Montalais, highly exasperated; "I am no longer a maid of honor, — of Madame's, at least."

"Have you given in your resignation, Mademoiselle?

That is well! I cannot but applaud such a determination, and I do applaud it."

"I do not give in my resignation, Madame; I take another service, — that is all."

"In the *bourgeoisie* or in the *robe?*" asked Madame de Saint-Remy, disdainfully.

"Please to learn, Madame, that I am not a girl to serve either *bourgeoises* or *robines;* and that, instead of the miserable court at which you vegetate, I am going to reside in a court almost royal."

"Ah! a royal court!" said Madame de Saint-Remy, forcing a laugh, — "a royal court! What think you of that, my daughter?" and she turned round towards Mademoiselle de la Vallière, whom she would by main force have dragged away from Montalais, and who, instead of obeying the impulse of Madame de Saint-Remy, looked first at her mother and then at Montalais with her beautiful conciliating eyes.

"I did not say a royal court, Madame," replied Montalais, "because Madame Henrietta, of England, who is about to become the wife of his royal Highness Monsieur, is not a queen. I said almost royal, and I spoke correctly, since she will be sister-in-law to the king."

A thunderbolt falling upon the castle of Blois would not have astonished Madame de Saint-Remy as did this last sentence of Montalais.

"What do you say of her royal Highness Madame Henrietta?" stammered the old lady.

"I say I am going to belong to her household, as maid of honor; that is what I say."

"As maid of honor!" cried at the same time Madame de Saint-Remy with despair, and Mademoiselle de la Vallière with delight.

"Yes, Madame, as maid of honor."

The old lady's head dropped as if the blow had been too severe for her; but almost immediately recovering herself, she launched a last projectile at her adversary. "Oh!" said she, "I have heard of many of these sorts of promises beforehand, which often lead people to flatter themselves with wild hopes, and at the last moment, when the time comes to keep the promises and have the hopes realized, they are surprised to see the great influence upon which they reckoned reduced to smoke."

"Oh, Madame, the influence of my patron is beyond question, and his promises are as good as acts."

"And would it be indiscreet to ask you the name of this powerful patron?"

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* no; it is that gentleman there," said Montalais, pointing to Malicorne, who during all this scene had preserved the most imperturbable coolness and the most comic dignity.

"Monsieur!" exclaimed Madame de Saint-Remy, with an explosion of hilarity, "Monsieur is your patron! Is the man whose influence is so powerful and whose promises are as good as acts, M. Malicorne?"

Malicorne bowed.

As to Montalais, her sole reply was to draw the commission from her pocket, and show it to the old lady. "Here is the commission," said she.

At once all was over. As soon as she had cast a rapid glance over this fortunate brevet, the good lady clasped her hands, an unspeakable expression of envy and despair contracted her countenance, and she was obliged to sit down to avoid fainting. Montalais was not malicious enough to rejoice extravagantly at her victory, or to overwhelm the conquered enemy, particularly when that enemy was the mother of her friend; she used, then, but did not abuse, her triumph. Malicorne was less

generous; he assumed noble attitudes in his arm-chair, and stretched himself out with a familiarity which two hours earlier would have drawn upon him threats of a caning.

"Maid of honor to the young Madame!" repeated Madame de Saint-Remy, still but half convinced.

"Yes, Madame; and through the patronage of M. Malicorne, moreover."

"It is incredible!" repeated the old lady. "Is it not incredible, Louise?" But Louise did not reply; she was depressed, thoughtful, almost afflicted. Passing one hand over her beautiful brow, she sighed heavily.

"Well, but, Monsieur," said Madame de Saint-Remy, all at once, "how did you manage to obtain this post?"

"I asked for it, Madame."

"Of whom?"

"One of my friends."

"And have you friends sufficiently powerful at court to give you such proofs of their influence?"

"It appears so."

"And may one ask the name of these friends?"

"I did not say I had many friends, Madame; I said I had one friend."

"And that friend is called —"

"Madame, you go too far! When one has a friend as powerful as mine, he does not publish his name in that fashion in open day, in order that he may be stolen from him."

"You are right, Monsieur, to be silent as to the name of that friend, for I think it would be pretty difficult for you to tell it."

"At all events," said Montalais, "if the friend does not exist, the commission does; and that cuts short the question."

"Then I conceive," said Madame de Saint-Remy, with the gracious smile of a cat who is going to scratch, "when I found Monsieur here just now — "

"Well?"

"He brought you your commission."

"Exactly, Madame; you have guessed rightly."

"Well, then, nothing can be more moral or proper."

"I think so, Madame."

"And I have been wrong, as it appears, in reproaching you, Mademoiselle."

"Very wrong, Madame, but I am so accustomed to your reproaches, that I pardon you these."

"In that case let us be gone, Louise, we have nothing further to do but to retire. Well!"

"Madame!" said La Vallière, starting, "did you speak?"

"You do not appear to listen, my child."

"No, Madame, I was thinking."

"About what?"

"A thousand things."

"You bear me no ill-will, at least, Louise?" cried Montalais, pressing her hand.

"And why should I, my dear Aure?" replied the girl, in a voice soft as a flute.

"*Dame!*" resumed Madame de Saint-Remy; "if she did bear you a little ill-will, poor girl, she could not be much blamed."

"And why should she bear me ill-will, good heavens!"

"It appears to me that she is of as good a family, and as pretty as you."

"Mother! mother!" cried Louise.

"Prettier a hundred times, Madame, — of a better family, no; but that does not tell me why Louise should bear me ill-will."

"Do you think it will be very amusing for her to be buried alive at Blois, when you are going to shine at Paris?"

"But, Madame, it is not I who prevent Louise following me thither; on the contrary, I should certainly be most happy if she came there."

"But it appears that M. Malicorne, who is all-powerful at court —"

"Ah! so much the worse, Madame!" said Malicorne; "every one for himself in this poor world."

"Malicorne!" said Montalais. Then stooping towards the young man: "Engage Madame de Saint-Remy, either in disputing with her or making up with her; I must speak to Louise;" and at the same time a soft pressure of the hand recompensed Malicorne for the obedience which was to follow.

Malicorne went grumbling towards Madame de Saint-Remy; while Montalais said to her friend, throwing one arm round her neck: "What is the matter, say? Is it true that you would not love me if I were to shine, as your mother says?"

"Oh, no!" said the young girl, with difficulty restraining her tears; "on the contrary, I rejoice at your good fortune."

"Rejoice! why, one would say you are ready to cry!"

"Do people never weep but from envy?"

"Oh! yes, I understand. I am going to Paris, and that word Paris recalls to your mind a certain cavalier —"

"Aure!"

"A certain cavalier who formerly lived near Blois and who now resides at Paris."

"In truth, I know not what ails me, but I feel stifled."

"Weep, then, weep, as you cannot give me a smile!"

Louise raised her sweet face, which the tears, rolling down one after the other, illumined like diamonds.

"Come, confess!" said Montalais.

"What shall I confess?"

"What makes you weep; people don't weep without a cause. I am your friend; whatever you would wish me to do, I will do. Malicorne is more powerful than you would think. Do you wish to come to Paris?"

"Alas!" sighed Louise.

"Do you wish to come to Paris?"

"To remain here alone in this old castle, I who have enjoyed the sweet habit of listening to your songs, of pressing your hand, of running about the park with you! Oh, how dull I shall be, how quickly I shall die!"

"Do you wish to come to Paris?"

Louise breathed another sigh.

"You do not answer me."

"What would you that I should answer you?"

"Yes or no; that is not very difficult, I think."

"Oh! you are very fortunate, Montalais!"

"That is to say you would like to be in my place."

Louise was silent.

"Little obstinate thing!" said Montalais; "did ever any one keep her secrets from her friend thus? But confess that you would like to come to Paris; confess that you are dying with the wish to see Raoul again."

"I cannot confess that."

"Then you are wrong."

"Why?"

"Because — Do you see this commission?"

"To be sure I do."

"Well, I would have procured for you one like it."

"By whose means?"

"Malicorne's."

"Aure, do you tell the truth? Is that possible?"

"*Dame!* Malicorne is there; and what he has done for me, he must do for you."

Malicorne had heard his name pronounced twice; he was delighted at having an opportunity to get through with Madame de Saint-Remy, and he turned round: "What is that, Mademoiselle?"

"Come hither, Malicorne!" said Montalais, with an imperious gesture. Malicorne obeyed.

"A commission like this!" said Montalais.

"How so?"

"A commission like this; that is plain enough."

"But —"

"I want one; I must have one!"

"Oh, you must have one!"

"Yes."

"It is impossible, is it not, M. Malicorne?" said Louise, with her sweet, soft voice.

"*Dame!* if it is for you, Mademoiselle —"

"For me. Yes, M. Malicorne, it would be for me."

"And if Mademoiselle de Montalais asks it at the same time —"

"Mademoiselle de Montalais does not ask it, she demands it."

"Well, we will endeavor to obey you, Mademoiselle."

"And you will have her appointed?"

"We will try."

"No evasive reply. Louise de la Vallière shall be maid of honor to Madame Henrietta within a week."

"How you go on!"

"Within a week, or else —"

"Well! or else —"

"You may take back your commission, M. Malicorne; I will not leave my friend."

"Dear Montalais!"

"Very well, keep your commission. Mademoiselle de la Vallière shall be a maid of honor."

"Is that true?"

"Quite true."

"I may then hope to go to Paris?"

"Depend upon it."

"Oh, M. Malicorne, what goodness!" cried Louise, clapping her hands and bounding with joy.

"Little dissembler!" said Montalais, "try again to make me believe you are not in love with Raoul."

Louise blushed like a rose in June, but instead of replying, ran and kissed her mother. "Madame," said she, "do you know that M. Malicorne is going to have me appointed maid of honor?"

"M. Malicorne is a prince in disguise," replied the old lady; "he is all-powerful."

"Would you also like to be maid of honor?" asked Malicorne of Madame de Saint-Remy. "While I am about it, I might as well get everybody appointed," and upon that he went away, leaving the poor lady quite disconcerted, as Tallemant des Réaux would say.

"Humph!" murmured Malicorne, as he descended the stairs, — "humph! there is another thousand livres that I must pay; but I must get through as well as I can. My friend Manicamp does nothing for nothing."

CHAPTER IX.

MALICORNE AND MANICAMP.

THE introduction of these two new personages into this history, and that mysterious affinity of names and sentiments, merit some attention on the part of the historian and the reader. We will then enter into some details concerning M. Malicorne and M. de Manicamp. Malicorne, we know, had made the journey to Orleans in search of the commission destined for Mademoiselle de Montalais, the arrival of which had produced such a great sensation at the castle of Blois. At that moment M. de Manicamp was at Orleans. A singular personage was this M. de Manicamp; a very intelligent young fellow, always poor, always needy, although he dipped his hand freely into the purse of M. le Comte de Guiche, one of the best-furnished purses of the period. M. le Comte de Guiche had had as the companion of his boyhood this Manicamp, a poor gentleman vassal, born of the house of Grammont. M. de Manicamp, by his intelligence, had created himself a revenue in the opulent family of the celebrated marshal. From his infancy he had, by a calculation much in advance of his age, lent his name and his complaisance to the follies of the Comte de Guiche. If his noble companion had stolen some fruit destined for Madame la Maréchale, if he had broken a mirror or put out a dog's eye, Manicamp declared himself guilty of the crime committed, and received the punishment, which was not made the milder for falling upon the innocent.

But this system of abnegation was profitable; instead of wearing such mean habiliments as his paternal fortunes entitled him to, he was able to appear brilliant, superb, like a young noble of fifty thousand livres a year.

It was not that he was mean in character or humble in spirit; no, he was a philosopher, or rather he had the indifference, the apathy, the extravagance which banish from man every feeling of the hierarchical world. His sole ambition was to spend money. But in this respect the worthy M. de Manicamp was a gulf. Three or four times every year regularly he drained the Comte de Guiche; and when the Comte de Guiche was thoroughly drained, when he had turned out his pockets and his purse before him, and declared that it would be at least a fortnight before paternal munificence would refill those pockets and that purse, Manicamp lost all his energy: he went to bed, remained there, ate nothing, and sold his fine clothes, under the pretence that, remaining in bed, he did not want them. During this prostration of mind and strength the purse of the Comte de Guiche was getting full again, and when once filled, overflowed into that of Manicamp, who bought new clothes, dressed himself again, and recommenced the same life he had followed before. This mania of selling his new clothes for a quarter of what they were worth had rendered our hero quite celebrated in Orleans, a city where generally — why, we should be puzzled to say — he came to pass his days of penitence. Provincial debauchees, fops of six hundred livres a year, shared the leavings of his opulence.

Among the admirers of these splendid toilettes, our friend Malicorne was conspicuous; he was the son of a syndic of the city, of whom M. le Prince de Condé, always needy like a Condé, often borrowed money at enormous interest. M. Malicorne kept the paternal money-chest;

that is to say, in those times of easy morals he had made for himself, by following the example of his father, and lending at high interest for short terms, a revenue of eighteen hundred livres, without reckoning six hundred other livres furnished by the generosity of the syndic; so that Malicorne was the king of the gay youth of Orleans, having twenty-four hundred livres to scatter, squander, and waste on follies of every kind. But, quite in contrast to Manicamp, Malicorne was terribly ambitious. He loved from ambition, he spent money from ambition, and he would have ruined himself from ambition.

Malicorne had determined to rise, at whatever price it might cost; and for this, at whatever price it did cost, he had given himself a mistress and a friend. The mistress, Mademoiselle de Montalais, was cruel, as regarded the highest favors of love; but she was of a noble family, and that was sufficient for Malicorne. The friend had no friendship, but he was the favorite of the Comte de Guiche, himself the friend of Monsieur the king's brother; and that was sufficient for Malicorne. Only, in the chapter of charges, Mademoiselle de Montalais cost *per annum*, in ribbons, gloves, and sweets, a thousand livres; Manicamp cost — money lent, never returned — from twelve to fifteen hundred livres *per annum:* so that there was nothing left for Malicorne. Ah, yes, we are mistaken; there was left the paternal strong-box. He employed a mode of proceeding, upon which he preserved the most profound secrecy, and which consisted in advancing to himself, from the coffer of the syndic, half a dozen years, that is to say, fifteen thousand livres, swearing to himself — observe, quite to himself — to repay this deficiency as soon as an opportunity should present itself. The opportunity was expected to be the concession of a good post in the household of Monsieur, when that household should

be established at the period of his marriage. This period had arrived, and the household was at last about to be established.

A good post in the family of a prince of the blood, when it is given by the influence and on the recommendation of such a friend as the Comte de Guiche, is worth at least twelve thousand livres *per annum*, and by the means which M. Malicorne had taken to make his revenues fructify, twelve thousand livres might rise to twenty thousand. Then, when once an incumbent of this post, he would marry Mademoiselle de Montalais. Mademoiselle de Montalais, of a family which the woman's side ennobles, not only would be dowered, but would ennoble Malicorne. But in order that Mademoiselle de Montalais, who had not a large patrimonial fortune, although an only daughter, might be suitably dowered, it was necessary that she should belong to some great princess as prodigal as the dowager Madame was covetous, and in order that the wife should not be on one side while the husband was on the other, — a situation which presents serious inconveniences, particularly with characters like those of the future consorts, — Malicorne had conceived the idea of making the central point of union the household of Monsieur the king's brother. Mademoiselle de Montalais would be maid of honor to Madame. M. Malicorne would be officer to Monsieur.

It is plain that the plan was formed by a clear head; it is plain, also, that it had been bravely executed. Malicorne had asked Manicamp to ask the Comte de Guiche for a commission of maid of honor; and the Comte de Guiche had asked this commission of Monsieur, who had signed it without hesitation. The moral plan of Malicorne, — for we may well suppose that the combinations of a mind as active as his were not confined to the present

but extended to the future, — the moral plan of Malicorne, we say, was this: to obtain entrance into the household of Madame Henrietta for a woman devoted to himself, who was intelligent, young, handsome, and intriguing; to learn, by means of this woman, all the feminine secrets of the young household; while he, Malicorne, and his friend Manicamp should between them know all the male secrets of the young community. By these means a rapid and splendid fortune might be acquired. Malicorne was a vile name, — he who bore it had too much wit to conceal this truth from himself, — but an estate might be purchased; and Malicorne of some place, or even Malicorne itself, quite short, would sound nobly in the ear.

It was not improbable that a most aristocratic origin might be found for this name of Malicorne; might it not come from some estate where a bull with fatal horns had caused some great misfortune, and baptized the soil with the blood it had spilt? It is true, this plan presented itself bristling with difficulties; but the greatest of all was Mademoiselle de Montalais herself. Capricious, variable, sly, giddy, free, prudish, a virgin armed with claws, Erigone stained with grapes, she sometimes overturned, with a single dash of her white fingers or with a single puff from her laughing lips, the edifice which had employed the patience of Malicorne a month to establish.

Love aside, Malicorne was happy; but this love which he could not help feeling, he had the strength carefully to conceal, persuaded that at the least relaxing of the ties by which he had bound his Protean sweetheart, the demon would overthrow him and laugh at him. He humbled his mistress by disdaining her. Burning with desire when she advanced to tempt him, he had the art to appear like ice, persuaded that if he opened his arms

she would run away laughing at him. On her side, Montalais believed that she did not love Malicorne, while, on the contrary, she did love him. Malicorne repeated to her so often his protestations of indifference, that she finished, sometimes, by believing him, and then she believed she detested him. If she tried to bring him back by coquetry, Malicorne played at coquetry better than she could. But what made Montalais hold to Malicorne inseparably was that Malicorne always came cram-full of fresh news brought from the court and the city; that he always brought to Blois a fashion, a secret, or a perfume; that he never asked for a meeting, but, on the contrary, required to be supplicated to receive the favors he burned to obtain. On her side, Montalais was no miser with stories. By her means Malicorne learned all that passed in the family of the dowager Madame; and he related to Manicamp tales that made him ready to die with laughing, which the latter out of idleness took ready-made to M. de Guiche, who carried them to Monsieur.

Such, in short, was the woof of petty interests and petty conspiracies which united Blois with Orleans, and Orleans with Paris; and which was about to bring into the last-named city, where she was to produce so great a revolution, the poor little La Vallière, who was far from suspecting, as she returned joyfully, leaning on the arm of her mother, for what a strange future she was reserved. As to the good man, Malicorne, — we speak of the syndic of Orleans, — he did not see more clearly into the present than others did into the future; and had no suspicion, as he walked every day, between three and five o'clock, after his dinner, upon the Place Ste.-Catherine, in his gray coat, cut after the fashion of Louis XIII., and his cloth shoes with great knots of ribbon, that it was he

who paid for all those bursts of laughter, all those stolen kisses, all those whisperings, all that ribbonry, and all those bubble projects which formed a chain of forty-five leagues in length, from the palais of Blois to the Palais-Royal.

CHAPTER X.

MANICAMP AND MALICORNE.

MALICORNE left Blois, as we have said, and went to find his friend Manicamp, then in temporary retreat in the city of Orleans. It was just at the moment when that young nobleman was employed in selling the last piece of decent clothing he had left. He had, a fortnight before, extorted from the Comte de Guiche a hundred pistoles, all he had to assist in equipping him properly to go and meet Madame, on her arrival at Havre. He had drawn from Malicorne, three days before, fifty pistoles, the price of the commission obtained for Montalais. He had then no expectations of anything else, having exhausted all his resources, with the exception of selling a handsome suit of cloth and satin, all embroidered and laced with gold, which had been the admiration of the court. But to be able to sell this suit, the last he had left, — as we have been forced to confess to the reader, — Manicamp had been obliged to take to his bed. No more fire, no more pocket-money, no more walking-money; nothing but sleep to take the place of banquets, companies, and balls. It has been said, "He who sleeps, dines;" but it has not been said, He who sleeps, plays, or, He who sleeps, dances. Manicamp, reduced to this extremity of neither playing nor dancing for a week at least, was consequently very sad; he was expecting a usurer, and saw Malicorne enter. A cry of distress escaped him.

"Eh! what!" said he, in a tone which nothing can describe, "is that you again, dea friend?"

"Humph! you are very polite! said Malicorne.

"Ay; but, look you, I was expecting money, and instead of the money, I see you come."

"And suppose I brought you some money?"

"Oh, then it is quite another thing! You are very welcome, my dear friend!" and he held out his hand, not for the hand of Malicorne, but for his purse. Malicorne pretended to be mistaken, and gave him his hand.

"And the money?" said Manicamp.

"My dear friend, if you wish to have it, earn it."

"What must be done for it?"

"Earn it, *parbleu!*"

"And in what way?"

"Oh, it is hard, I warn you!"

"The devil!"

"You must get out of bed, and go immediately to M. le Comte de Guiche."

"I get up!" said Manicamp, stretching himself in his bed voluptuously; "oh, no, thank you!"

"You have, then, sold all your clothes?"

"No; I have one suit left, — the handsomest even, — but I expect a purchaser."

"And the hose?"

"Well, if you look, you can see them on that chair."

"Very well; since you have some hose and a doublet left, put your legs into the first and your back into the other, have a horse saddled, and set off."

"Not I."

"And why not?"

"*Morbleu!* don't you know, then, that M. de Guiche is at Étampes?"

"No; I thought he was at Paris. You will have then only fifteen leagues to go, instead of thirty."

"You are a wonderfully clever fellow! If I were to ride fifteen leagues in these clothes, they would never be fit to put on again; and instead of selling them for thirty pistoles, I should be obliged to take fifteen for them."

"Sell them for what you like, but I must have a second commission of maid of honor."

"Good! For whom? Is Montalais doubled, then?"

"Vile fellow! It is you who are doubled, you swallow up two fortunes, — mine and that of M. le Comte de Guiche."

"You should say that of M. le Comte de Guiche and yours."

"That is true, — honor where it is due; but I return to my commission."

"And you are wrong."

"Prove me that."

"My friend, there will be only twelve maids of honor for Madame; I have already obtained for you what twelve hundred women are trying for, and for that I was forced to employ diplomacy."

"Oh, yes, I know you have been quite heroic, my dear friend."

"We know what we are about," said Manicamp.

"To whom do you tell that? When I am king, I promise you one thing."

"What? To call yourself Malicorne I.?"

"No; to make you superintendent of my finances. But that is not the question now."

"Unfortunately."

"The present affair is to procure for me a second place of maid of honor."

"My friend, if you were to promise me heaven I would not disturb myself at this moment."

Malicorne chinked the money in his pocket. "There are twenty pistoles here," said he.

"And what would you do with twenty pistoles, *mon Dieu!*"

"Well," said Malicorne, a little angrily, "suppose I were only to add them to the five hundred you already owe me?"

"You are right," replied Manicamp, stretching out his hand again, "and in that point of view I can accept them. Give them to me."

"One moment. What the devil! it is not only holding out your hand that will do; if I give you the twenty pistoles, shall I have my commission?"

"To be sure you shall."

"Soon?"

"To-day."

"Oh, take care, M. de Manicamp! You undertake much, and I do not ask all that. Thirty leagues in one day is too much, and you would kill yourself."

"I think nothing impossible when obliging a friend."

"You are quite heroic."

"Where are the twenty pistoles?"

"Here they are," said Malicorne, showing them.

"That is well."

"Yes, but, my dear M. Manicamp, you would consume them in nothing but post-horses."

"No, no; make yourself easy on that head."

"Pardon me; why, it is fifteen leagues from this place to Étampes."

"Fourteen."

"Well, fourteen be it. Fourteen leagues make seven posts, at twenty sous the post, seven livres; seven livres

the courier, fourteen; as many for coming back, twenty-eight; as much for bed and supper, — that makes sixty of the livres which this accommodation would cost you."

Manicamp stretched himself like a serpent in his bed, and fixing his two great eyes upon Malicorne, "You are right," said he; "I could not return before to-morrow," and he took the twenty pistoles.

"Now, then, be off!"

"Well, as I cannot be back before to-morrow, we have time."

"Time for what?"

"Time to play."

"What do you wish to play with?"

"Your twenty pistoles, *pardieu!*"

"No; you always win."

"I will wager them, then."

"Against what?"

"Against twenty others."

"And what shall be the object of the wager?"

"This. We have said it was fourteen leagues to Étampes?"

"Yes."

"And fourteen leagues back?"

"Yes."

"Consequently twenty-eight leagues."

"Doubtless."

"Well, for these twenty eight leagues you cannot allow less than fourteen hours?"

"That is agreed."

"One hour to find the Comte de Guiche."

"Go on."

"And an hour to persuade him to write a letter to Monsieur."

"Just so."

"Sixteen hours in all."

"You reckon as well as M. Colbert."

"It is now twelve o'clock."

"Half-past."

"Humph! you have a fine watch."

"What were you saying?" said Malicorne, putting his watch back into his fob.

"Ah! true; I was offering to lay you twenty pistoles against these you have lent me, that you will have the Comte de Guiche's letter in —"

"How soon?"

"In eight hours."

"Have you a winged horse?"

"That is my affair. Will you wager?"

"I shall have the count's letter in eight hours?"

"Yes."

"Signed?"

"Yes."

"In hand?"

"In hand."

"Well, be it so; I wager," said Malicorne, curious to know how this seller of clothes would get through.

"Is it agreed?"

"It is."

"Pass me the pen, ink, and paper."

"Here they are."

"Thank you."

Manicamp raised himself with a sigh, and leaning on his left arm, in his best hand traced the following lines: —

An order for a place of maid of honor to Madame, which M. le Comte de Guiche will take upon him to obtain at sight.

DE MANICAMP.

This painful task accomplished, he stretched himself at full length again.

"Well!" asked Malicorne, "what does this mean?"

"That means that if you are in a hurry to have the letter from the Comte de Guiche for Monsieur, I have won my wager."

"How the devil is that?"

"That is transparent enough, I think; you take that paper."

"Well?"

"And you set out instead of me."

"Ah!"

"You put your horses to their best speed."

"Good!"

"In six hours you will be at Étampes; in seven hours you have the letter from the count, and I shall have won my wager without having stirred from my bed, — which suits me and you too at the same time, I am very sure."

"Decidedly, Manicamp, you are a great man."

"I know that."

"I am to start, then, for Étampes?"

"Directly."

"I am to go to the Comte de Guiche with this order?"

"He will give you a similar one for Monsieur."

"I am to go to Paris."

"You will go and find Monsieur with the Comte de Guiche's order."

"Monsieur will approve?"

"Instantly."

"And I shall have my commission?"

"You shall."

"Ah!"

"Well, I hope I behave properly?"

"Admirably."

"Thank you."

"You do as you please, then, with the Comte de Guiche, my dear Manicamp?"

"Except making money of him, — everything."

"*Diable!* the exception is annoying; but then, if instead of asking him for money, you were to ask —"

"What?"

"Something important."

"What do you call important?"

"Well, suppose one of your friends asked you to render him a service?"

"I would not render it to him."

"Selfish fellow!"

"Or at least I would ask him what service he would render me in exchange."

"Ah! that is fair. Well, that friend speaks to you."

"What! you, Malicorne!"

"Yes; it is I."

"Ah! you are rich, then?"

"I have still fifty pistoles left."

"Exactly the sum I want. Where are those fifty pistoles?"

"Here," said Malicorne, slapping his pocket.

"Then speak, my friend; what do you want?"

Malicorne took up the pen, ink, and paper again, and presented them all to Manicamp. "Write!" said he.

"Dictate!"

"An order for a place in the household of Monsieur."

"Oh!" said Manicamp, laying down the pen, "a place in the household of Monsieur for fifty pistoles?"

"You mistook me, my friend; you did not hear plainly."

"What did you say, then?"

"I said five hundred."

"And the five hundred?"

"Here they are."

Manicamp devoured the *rouleau* with his eyes; but this time Malicorne held it at a distance. "Eh! what do you say to that? Five hundred pistoles."

"I say it is for nothing, my friend," said Manicamp, taking up the pen again, "and you will wear out my credit. Dictate!"

Malicorne continued: —

"Which my friend the Comte de Guiche will obtain from Monsieur for my friend Malicorne."

"There you are!" said Manicamp.

"Pardon me, you have forgotten to sign."

"Ah! that is true. The five hundred pistoles?"

"Here are two hundred and fifty of them."

"And the other two hundred and fifty?"

"When I shall be in possession of my place."

Manicamp made a face.

"In that case give me the recommendation back again."

"What for?"

"To add two words to it."

"Two words?"

"Yes; two words only."

"What are they?"

"'In haste.'"

Malicorne returned the recommendation; Manicamp added the words.

"Good!" said Malicorne, taking back the paper.

Manicamp began to count the pistoles. "There are twenty wanting," said he.

"How so?"

"The twenty I have won."

"In what way?"

"By wagering that you would have the letter from the Comte de Guiche in eight hours."

"That 's fair;" and he gave him the twenty pistoles.

Manicamp began to take up his gold by handfuls, and pour it down in cascades upon his bed.

"This second place," murmured Malicorne, while drying his paper, "which, at the first glance, appears to cost me more than the first, but — "

He stopped, took up the pen in his turn, and wrote to Montalais: —

MADEMOISELLE, — Announce to your friend that her commission will not be long in arriving. I am setting out to get it signed; that will be eighty-six leagues I shall have gone for the love of you.

Then with his cunning smile, resuming his broken soliloquy, "This place," said he, "at the first glance, appears to cost me more than the first; but the benefit will be, I hope, in proportion to the expense, and Mademoiselle de la Vallière will bring me back more than Mademoiselle de Montalais, or else — or else my name is not Malicorne. Farewell, Manicamp!" and he left the room.

CHAPTER XI.

THE COURTYARD OF THE HÔTEL GRAMMONT.

When Malicorne arrived at Étampes, he was informed that the Comte de Guiche had just set out for Paris. He took a two hours' rest, and then prepared to continue his journey. He reached Paris during the night, and alighted at a small hotel which he had frequented in his previous journeys to the capital, and at eight o'clock the next morning presented himself at the Hôtel Grammont. Malicorne arrived just in time; for the Comte de Guiche was on the point of taking leave of Monsieur before setting out for Havre, where the *élite* of the French nobility had gone to await Madame's arrival from England. Malicorne pronounced the name of Manicamp, and was immediately admitted. He found the Comte de Guiche in the courtyard of the Hôtel Grammont, inspecting his horses, which his trainers and equerries were passing in review before him. The count, in the presence of his trades people and of his servants, was engaged in praising or blaming, as the case seemed to deserve, the appointments, horses, and harness which were submitted to his inspection, when, in the midst of this important occupation, the name of Manicamp was announced.

"Manicamp!" he exclaimed; "let him enter by all means;" and he advanced a few steps towards the door.

Malicorne slipped through the half-open door, and looking at the Comte de Guiche, who was surprised to see a face which he did not recognize instead of the one he

expected, said: "Forgive me, Monsieur the Count, but I believe a mistake has been made. M. Manicamp himself was announced to you, instead of which it is only an envoy from him."

"Ah!" said De Guiche, rather coldly; "and what do you bring me?"

"A letter, Monsieur the Count." Malicorne handed him the document, and narrowly watched the count's face, who, as he read it, began to laugh.

"What!" he exclaimed, "another maid of honor? Are all the maids of honor in France, then, under his protection?" Malicorne bowed. "Why does he not come himself?" De Guiche inquired.

"He is confined to his bed."

"The deuce! he has no money, then, I suppose," said De Guiche, shrugging his shoulders. "But what does he do with his money?"

Malicorne made a movement to indicate that upon this subject he was as ignorant as the count himself.

"Then why does he not make use of his credit?" continued De Guiche.

"With regard to that, I think —"

"What?"

"That Manicamp has credit with no one but yourself, Monsieur the Count."

"He will not be at Havre, then?"

Whereupon Malicorne made another movement.

"It seems to be impossible, and yet every one will be there."

"I trust, Monsieur the Count, that he will not neglect so excellent an opportunity."

"He should be at Paris by this time."

"He will take the cross road, to make up for lost time."

"Where is he now?"

"At Orleans."

"Monsieur," said De Guiche, bowing, "you seem to me a man of very good taste."

Malicorne wore Manicamp's clothes. He bowed in return, saying, "You do me very great honor, Monsieur."

"Whom have I the pleasure of addressing?"

"My name is Malicorne, Monsieur."

"M. de Malicorne, what do you think of these pistol-holsters?"

Malicorne was a man of great readiness, and immediately understood the situation. Besides, the "de" which De Guiche had prefixed to Malicorne's name raised him to the rank of the person with whom he was conversing. He looked at the holsters with the air of a connoisseur, and said, without hesitation, "Somewhat heavy, Monsieur."

"You see," said De Guiche to the saddler, "this gentleman, who is a man of taste, thinks your holsters heavy, — a complaint I had already made." The saddler was full of excuses.

"And what do you think," asked De Guiche, "of this horse, which is a purchase I have just made?"

"To look at him, he seems perfect, Monsieur the Count; but I must mount him before I give you my opinion."

"Do so, M. de Malicorne, and ride him round the court two or three times."

The courtyard of the hotel was so arranged that whenever there was any occasion for it, it could be used as a riding-school. Malicorne, with perfect ease, arranged the curb and snaffle reins, placed his left hand on the horse's mane, and with his foot in the stirrup raised himself to the saddle. At first he made the horse walk the whole circuit of the courtyard at a foot-pace; next at a trot; lastly at a gallop. He then drew up close to the count, dismounted, and threw the bridle to a groom standing by.

"Well," said the count, "what do you think of it, M. de Malicorne?"

"This horse, Monsieur the Count," said Malicorne, "is of the Mecklenburg breed. In looking to see whether the bit suited his mouth, I saw that he was rising seven, the very age when the training of a war-horse should begin. The fore-hand is light. A horse which holds his head high, it is said, never tires his rider's hand. The withers are rather low. The drooping of the hind-quarters would almost make me doubt the purity of its German breed, and I think there is English blood in him. He stands well on his legs, but he trots high, and may cut himself, which requires attention to be paid to his shoeing. He is tractable; and as I made him turn round and change his feet, I found him quick and ready in doing so."

"Well said, M. de Malicorne," exclaimed the count; "you are a judge of horses, I perceive;" then, turning toward the new arrival again, he continued: "You are most becomingly dressed, M. de Malicorne. That is not a provincial cut, I presume. Such a style of dress is not to be met with at Tours or Orleans."

"No, Monsieur the Count; my clothes were made at Paris."

"There is no doubt of that. But let us resume our own affair. Manicamp wishes, then, for the appointment of a second maid of honor."

"You perceive what he has written, Monsieur the Count."

"For whom was the first appointment?"

Malicorne felt the color rise in his face, as he answered hurriedly, "A charming maid of honor, Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"Ah! you are acquainted with her?"

"We are affianced, or nearly so."

"That is quite another thing, then, a thousand compliments," exclaimed De Guiche, upon whose lips a courtier's jest was already flitting, but to whom the word "affianced," applied by Malicorne to Mademoiselle de Montalais, recalled the respect due to women.

"And for whom is the second appointment destined?" inquired De Guiche; "is it for any one to whom Manicamp may happen to be affianced? In that case I pity her, poor girl! for she will have a sad fellow for a husband."

"No, Monsieur the Count; the second appointment is for Mademoiselle de la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière."

"Unknown," said De Guiche.

"Unknown? yes, Monsieur," said Malicorne, smiling in his turn.

"Very good. I will speak to Monsieur about it. By the by, she is of gentle birth?"

"She belongs to a very good family, and is maid of honor to Madame the Dowager."

"Very well. Will you accompany me to Monsieur?"

"Most certainly, if I may be permitted the honor."

"Have you your carriage?"

"No; I came here on horseback."

"Dressed as you are?"

"No, Monsieur; I posted from Orleans, and changed my travelling suit for the one I have on, in order to present myself to you."

"True, you have already told me you came from Orleans;" saying which he crumpled Manicamp's letter in his hand, and thrust it in his pocket.

"Monsieur," said Malicorne, timidly, "I do not think you have read all."

"Not read all, do you say?"

"No; there were two letters in the same envelope."

"Oh! are you sure?"

"Quite sure."

"Let us look, then," said the count, as he opened the letter again.

"Ah! you are right," he said, opening the paper which he had not yet read.

"I suspected it," he continued; "another application for an appointment under Monsieur. This Manicamp is a perfect gulf; he is carrying on a trade in it."

"No, Monsieur the Count, he wishes to make a present of it."

"To whom?"

"To myself, Monsieur."

"Why did you not say so at once, my dear M. de Mauvaisecorne?"

"Malicorne, Monsieur the Count."

"Forgive me; it is the Latin which bothers me,—that terrible habit of derivations. Why the deuce are young men of family taught Latin? *Mala* and *mauvaise*,—you understand it is the same thing. You will forgive me, I trust, M. de Malicorne."

"Your kindness affects me much, Monsieur; but it is a reason why I should make you acquainted with one circumstance without any delay."

"What is it, Monsieur?"

"That I was not born a gentleman. I am not without courage, and not altogether deficient in ability, but my name is Malicorne simply."

"You appear to me, Monsieur," exclaimed the count, looking at the astute face of his companion, "to be a most agreeable man. Your face pleases me, M Malicorne; and you must possess some indisputably excellent qualities to have pleased that egotistical Manicamp Be candid, and tell me whether you are not some saint descended upon the earth."

"Why so?"

"For the simple reason that he makes you a present of anything. Did you not say that he intended to make you a present of some appointment in the king's household?"

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur the Count; but if I succeed in obtaining the appointment, you, and not he, will have bestowed it on me."

"Besides, he will not have given it to you for nothing, I suppose. Stay, I have it!—there is a Malicorne at Orleans, who lends money to the prince"

"I think that must be my father, Monsieur."

"Ah! the prince has the father, and that terrible devourer of a Manicamp has the son. Take care, Monsieur! I know him. He will fleece you completely."

"The only difference is that I lend without interest," said Malicorne, smiling

"I was correct in saying that you were a saint, or that you very much resembled one. M. Malicorne, you shall have the post you want, or I will forfeit my name."

"Ah! Monsieur the Count, what a debt of gratitude shall I not owe you!" said Malicorne, enraptured.

"Let us go to the prince, my dear M. Malicorne," and De Guiche proceeded towards the door, desiring Malicorne to follow him.

At the very moment they were about to cross the threshold, a young man appeared on the other side. He was from twenty-four to twenty-five years of age, of pale complexion, thin lips, bright eyes, and brown hair and eyebrows. "Good-day," he said, suddenly, almost pushing De Guiche back into the courtyard again.

"Ah! is that you, De Wardes? What! and booted, spurred, and whip in hand too?"

"The most befitting costume for a man about to set

off for Havre. There will be no one left in Paris to-morrow;" and the new-comer saluted Malicorne with great ceremony, whose handsome dress gave him the appearance of a prince in rank.

"M. Malicorne," said De Guiche to his friend. De Wardes bowed.

"M. de Wardes," said De Guiche to Malicorne, who bowed in return. "By the by, De Wardes," continued De Guiche, "you who are on the watch for this sort of thing, can you tell us what appointments are still vacant at the Court, or rather in the prince's household?"

"In the prince's household," said De Wardes, looking up with an air of consideration; "let me see, — that of the master of the horse is vacant, I believe."

"Oh," exclaimed Malicorne, "there is no question of such a post as that, Monsieur; my ambition is not nearly so exalted."

De Wardes had a more penetrating observation than De Guiche, and he understood Malicorne immediately. "The fact is," he said, looking at him from head to foot, "a man must be either a duke or a peer to fill that post."

"All I solicit," said Malicorne, "is a very humble appointment; I am of little importance, and I do not rank myself above my position."

"M. Malicorne, whom you see here," said De Guiche to De Wardes, "is a very excellent fellow, whose only misfortune is that of not being of gentle birth. But as far as I am concerned, you know, I attach little value to those who have gentle birth alone to boast of."

"Assuredly," said De Wardes; "but will you allow me to remark, my dear count, that, without rank of some sort, one can hardly hope to belong to his royal Highness's household."

"You are right," said the count; "the etiquette is very

strict with regard to such matters. The deuce! we never thought of that."

"Alas! a sad misfortune for me, Monsieur the Count!" said Malicorne, changing color slightly.

"Yet not without remedy, I hope,' returned De Guiche.

"The remedy is found easily enough," exclaimed De Wardes; "you can be created a gentleman, my dear Monsieur. His Eminence the Cardinal Mazarin did nothing else from morning till night"

"Hush, hush, De Wardes!" said the count; "no jests of that kind; it ill becomes us to turn such matters into ridicule. Letters of nobility, it is true, are purchasable; but that is a sufficient misfortune without the nobles themselves laughing at it."

"Upon my word, De Guiche, you 're quite a Puritan, as the English say."

At this moment the Vicomte de Bragelonne was announced by one of the servants in the courtyard, in precisely the same manner as he would have done in a salon.

"Come here, my dear Raoul. What! you, too, booted and spurred? You are setting off, then?"

Bragelonne approached the group of young men, and saluted them with that quiet and serious manner which was peculiar to him. His salutation was principally addressed to De Wardes, with whom he was unacquainted, and whose features, on perceiving Raoul, had assumed a strange sternness of expression. "I have come, De Guiche," he said, "to ask your companionship. We set off for Havre, I presume.'

"This is admirable, this is delightful! We shall have a capital journey. M. Malicorne, M. de Bragelonne — ah! M. de Wardes, let me present you." The young men saluted each other in a restrained manner. Their natures seemed, from the very beginning, disposed to

take exception to each other. De Wardes was pliant, subtle, and full of dissimulation; Raoul was calm, grave, and upright. "Decide between us, — between De Wardes and myself, Raoul."

"Upon what subject?"

"Upon the subject of noble birth"

"Who can be better informed on that subject than a Grammont?"

"No compliments; it is your opinion I ask."

"At least inform me of the subject under discussion."

"De Wardes asserts that the distribution of titles is abused; I, on the contrary, maintain that a title is useless as regards the man on whom it is bestowed."

"And you are correct," said Bragelonne, quietly.

"But, Monsieur the Viscount," interrupted De Wardes, with a kind of obstinacy, "I affirm that it is I who am correct."

"What was your opinion, Monsieur?"

"I was saying that everything possible is done in France at the present moment to humiliate men of family."

"And by whom?" asked Raoul.

"By the king himself. He surrounds himself with people who cannot show four quarterings."

"Nonsense!" said De Guiche, "where could you possibly have seen that, De Wardes?"

"One example will suffice," he returned, directing his look fully upon Raoul.

"State it, then."

"Do you know who has just been nominated captain-general of the Musketeers, — an appointment more valuable than a peerage, for it gives precedence over all the marshals of France?"

Raoul's color mounted in his face; for he saw the

object De Wardes had in view. "No, who has been appointed? In any case it must have been very recently, for the appointment was vacant a week ago, a proof of which is that the king refused Monsieur, who solicited the post for one of his *protégés*."

"Well, the king refused it to Monsieur's *protégé* in order to bestow it upon the Chevalier d'Artagnan, a younger brother of some Gascon family, who has been trailing his sword in the antechambers during the last thirty years."

"Pardon me if I interrupt you, Monsieur," said Raoul, darting a stern glance at De Wardes; "but you give me the impression of being unacquainted with the gentleman of whom you are speaking."

"I unacquainted with M. d'Artagnan? Can you tell me, Monsieur, who does know him?"

"Those who do know him, Monsieur," replied Raoul, with still greater calmness and sternness of manner, "are in the habit of saying that if he is not as good a gentleman as the king, — which is not his fault, — he is the equal of all the kings of the earth in courage and loyalty. Such is my opinion, Monsieur; and I thank Heaven I have known M. d'Artagnan from my birth."

De Wardes was about to reply, when De Guiche interrupted him.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PORTRAIT OF MADAME.

THE discussion was becoming full of bitterness. De Guiche perfectly understood the whole matter; for there was in De Bragelonne's look something instinctively hostile, while in that of De Wardes there was something like a determination to offend. Without inquiring into the different feelings which actuated his two friends, De Guiche resolved to ward off the blow which he felt was on the point of being dealt by one or the other of them, and perhaps by both. "Gentlemen," he said, "we must take leave of one another; I must pay a visit to Monsieur. Let us fulfil our appointments. You, De Wardes, will accompany me to the Louvre, and you, Raoul, will remain here master of the house; and as all that is done here is under your advice, you will bestow the last glance upon my preparations for departure."

Raoul, with the air of one who neither seeks nor fears a quarrel, bowed his head in token of assent, and seated himself upon a bench in the sun. "That is well," said De Guiche; "remain where you are, Raoul, and tell them to show you the two horses I have just purchased. You will give me your opinion, for I only bought them on condition that you ratified the purchase. By the by, I have to beg your pardon for having omitted to inquire after the Comte de la Fère." While pronouncing these latter words, he closely observed De Wardes, in order to perceive what effect the name of Raoul's father would produce upon him.

"I thank you," answered the young man, "the count is very well."

A gleam of deep hatred passed into De Wardes' eyes. De Guiche, who appeared not to notice the ominous expression, went up to Raoul, and grasping him by the hand said, "It is agreed, then, Bragelonne, is it not, that you will rejoin us in the courtyard of the Palais Royal?" He then signed to De Wardes, who had been engaged in balancing himself, first on one foot, then on the other, to follow him. "We are going," said he; "come, M. Malicorne."

That name made Raoul start; for it seemed to him that he had heard it pronounced before, but he could not remember on what occasion. While trying to do so, half dreamingly, yet half irritated at his conversation with De Wardes, the three young men went on their way towards the Palais-Royal, where Monsieur was residing. Malicorne learned two things, — the first, that the young men had something to say to each other; and the second, that he ought not to walk in the same line with them, and therefore he walked behind.

"Are you mad?" said De Guiche to his companion, as soon as they had left the Hôtel de Grammont; "you attack M. d'Artagnan, and that, too, before Raoul."

"Well," said De Wardes, "what then?"

"What do you mean by 'what then'?"

"Well, is there any prohibition against attacking M. d'Artagnan?"

"But you know very well that M. d'Artagnan was one of those celebrated and redoubtable four men who were called the Musketeers."

"That may be; but I do not perceive why that should prevent me from hating M. d'Artagnan."

"What cause has he given you?"

"Me? personally, none."

"Why hate him, then?"

"Ask my dead father that question."

"Really, my dear De Wardes, you surprise me. M. d'Artagnan is not one to leave unsettled any enmity he may have to arrange, without completely clearing his account. Your father, I have heard, on his side carried matters with a high hand. Moreover, there are no enmities so bitter that they may not be washed away by blood, by a good sword-thrust loyally given."

"Listen to me, my dear De Guiche. This inveterate dislike existed between my father and M. d'Artagnan; and when I was quite a child he acquainted me with the reason for it, and it is a particular legacy which he has left me as part of my inheritance"

"And does this hatred concern M. d'Artagnan alone?"

"As for that, M. d'Artagnan was so intimately associated with his three friends, that some portion of the full measure of my hatred for him must inevitably fall to their lot; and that hatred is of such a nature that whenever the opportunity occurs, they shall have no occasion to complain of their portion."

De Guiche had kept his eyes fixed on De Wardes, and shuddered at the bitter manner in which the young man smiled. Something like a presentiment flashed across his mind. He knew that the time had passed away for home thrusts between gentlemen, but that the feeling of hatred treasured up in the heart, instead of being diffused abroad, was none the less hatred; that a smile was sometimes as full of sinister meaning as a threat; and, in a word, that to the fathers who had hated with their hearts and fought with their strength, would now succeed the sons, who themselves also would indeed hate with their hearts, but would no longer encounter their

enemies save by the means of intrigue or treachery. As, therefore, it certainly was not Raoul whom he could suspect either of intrigue or of treachery, it was on Raoul's account that De Guiche trembled.

However, while these gloomy forebodings cast a shade of anxiety over De Guiche's countenance, De Wardes had resumed entire mastery over himself. "At all events," he observed, "I have no personal ill will towards M. de Bragelonne; I do not even know him."

"In any case," said De Guiche, with a certain amount of sternness in his tone, "do not forget one circumstance, — that Raoul is my most intimate friend," a remark at which De Wardes bowed.

The conversation terminated there, although De Guiche tried his utmost to draw out De Wardes' secret from him; but doubtless that young gentleman had determined to say nothing further, and he remained impenetrable. De Guiche therefore promised himself a more satisfactory result with Raoul.

In the mean time they had reached the Palais-Royal, which was surrounded by a crowd of lookers-on. Monsieur's household awaited his orders to mount their horses, and form part of the escort of the ambassadors to whom had been intrusted the care of bringing the young princess to Paris.

The brilliant display of horses, arms, and liveries afforded some compensation in those times, thanks to the kindly feelings of the people and to the traditions of deep devotion to their sovereigns, for the enormous expenses charged upon the taxes. Mazarin had said, "Let them sing, provided they pay;" while Louis XIV.'s remark was, "Let them look." Sight had replaced the voice; the people could still look, but they could no longer sing.

M. de Guiche left De Wardes and Malicorne at the foot

of the grand staircase, while he himself, who shared the favor of Monsieur with the Chevalier de Lorraine, who always smiled at him most affectionately though he could not endure him, went straight to the prince's apartments, and found him engaged in admiring himself in the glass and putting rouge on his face. In a corner of the room the Chevalier de Lorraine was extended full length upon some cushions, having just had his long blond hair curled, with which he was playing after the manner of a woman.

The prince turned round as the count entered, and perceiving who it was, said: "Ah! is that you, Guiche? Come here, and tell me the truth."

"You know, my Lord, it is one of my defects to speak the truth."

"Fancy, Guiche, how that wicked chevalier has annoyed me."

The chevalier shrugged his shoulders.

"Why, how is that?" inquired De Guiche. "That is not customary with Monsieur the Chevalier."

"Well, he pretends," continued the prince, "that Mademoiselle Henrietta is better looking as a woman than I am as a man."

"Do not forget, my Lord," said De Guiche frowning slightly, "that you required me to speak the truth."

"Certainly," said the prince, almost trembling.

"Well, and I shall tell it you"

"Do not be in a hurry, Guiche!" exclaimed the prince; "you have plenty of time. Look at me attentively, and try to recollect Madame. Besides, here is her portrait; look at it;" and he held out to him a miniature of the finest possible execution.

De Guiche took it, and looked at it for a long time attentively. "Upon my honor, my Lord, this is indeed a most lovely face."

"But look at me, Count, look at me!" said the prince, endeavoring to direct upon himself the attention of the count, who was completely absorbed in contemplation of the portrait.

"It is wonderful," murmured De Guiche.

"Really, one would almost imagine you had never seen this little girl before."

"It is true, my Lord, I have seen her, but it was five years ago, and there is a great difference between a child of twelve years and a young girl of seventeen."

"Well, what is your opinion? Speak out!"

"My opinion is that the portrait must be flattering, my Lord."

"Of that," said the prince, triumphantly, "there can be no doubt; but let us suppose that it is not flattering, what would your opinion be?"

"My Lord, your Highness is exceedingly happy to have so charming a bride."

"Very well; that is your opinion of her, but now of me."

"My opinion, my Lord, is that you are far too handsome for a man."

The Chevalier de Lorraine burst out laughing. The prince understood how severe towards himself this opinion of the Comte de Guiche was, and he looked somewhat displeased, saying, "My friends are not over-indulgent."

De Guiche looked at the portrait again, and after a few seconds of contemplation, returned it with apparent unwillingness to Monsieur, saying, "Most decidedly, my Lord, I should rather prefer to look ten times at your Highness than to look at Madame once again."

Doubtless the chevalier detected some mystery in these words, which were incomprehensible to the prince, for he exclaimed, "Very well; get married yourself."

Monsieur continued rouging himself; and when he had

finished, looked at the portrait again, once more turned to admire himself in the glass, and smiled, and no doubt was satisfied with the comparison. "You are very kind to have come," he said to De Guiche; "I feared you would leave without coming to bid me adieu."

"Your Highness knows me too well to believe me capable of so great a disrespect."

"Besides, I suppose you have something to ask from me before leaving Paris?"

"Your Highness has indeed guessed correctly, for I have a request to make."

"Very good; what is it?"

The Chevalier de Lorraine immediately became all eyes and ears, for he regarded every favor conferred upon another as a robbery committed against himself. And as De Guiche hesitated, the prince said: "If it be money, nothing could be more fortunate, for I am tremendously rich; the superintendent of the finances has sent me fifty thousand pistoles."

"I thank your Highness, but it is not an affair of money."

"What is it, then? Tell me."

"The appointment of a maid of honor."

"*Tudieu!* Guiche, what a patron you have become!" said the prince, disdainfully; "you never speak of anything else now but young misses."

The Chevalier de Lorraine smiled, for he knew very well that nothing displeased the prince more than to show any interest in ladies. "My Lord," said the count, "it is not I who am directly interested in the person of whom I have just spoken; I am acting on behalf of one of my friends."

"Ah! that is different; what is the name of the young lady in whom your friend is interested?"

"Mademoiselle de la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière; she is already maid of honor to the dowager princess."

"Why, she is lame," said the Chevalier de Lorraine, stretching himself on his cushions.

"Lame," repeated the prince, "and Madame to have her constantly before her eyes! Most certainly not! It may be dangerous for her when in an interesting condition."

The Chevalier de Lorraine burst out laughing.

"Chevalier," said De Guiche, "your conduct is ungenerous, while I am soliciting a favor, you do me all the mischief you can."

"Forgive me, Count," said the Chevalier de Lorraine, somewhat uneasy at the tone in which the count had emphasized his words; "but I had no intention of doing so, and I begin to believe that I have mistaken one young lady for another."

"There is no doubt of it, Monsieur, and I do not hesitate to declare that such is the case."

"Do you attach much importance to it, Guiche?" inquired the prince.

"I do, my Lord."

"Well, you shall have it; but ask me for no more appointments, for there are none to give away."

"Ah!" exclaimed the chevalier, "midday already; that is the hour fixed for the departure."

"You dismiss me, Monsieur?" inquired De Guiche.

"Really, Count, you treat me very ill to-day," replied the chevalier, affectionately.

"For heaven's sake, Count, for heaven's sake, Chevalier," said Monsieur, "do not quarrel so! Do you not see how you are distressing me?"

"My signature?" said De Guiche.

"Take a blank appointment from that drawer, and give

it to me." De Guiche handed the prince the document indicated, and at the same time presented him with a pen already dipped in ink; whereupon the prince signed. "Here," he said, returning him the appointment; "but I give it on one condition."

"Name it."

"That you will make friends with the chevalier."

"Willingly," said De Guiche; and he held out his hand to the chevalier with an indifference amounting to contempt.

"Adieu, Count!" said the chevalier, without seeming in any way to have noticed his slight; "adieu, and bring us back a princess who will not chatter with her own portrait too much."

"Yes, set off and lose no time. By the by, who accompany you?"

"Bragelonne and De Wardes."

"Both excellent and fearless companions."

"Too fearless," said the chevalier; "endeavor to bring them both back, Count."

"Bad heart, bad heart!" murmured De Guiche; "he scents mischief everywhere, and before any one else;" and taking leave of the prince, he went out. As soon as he reached the vestibule, he waved in the air the paper which the prince had signed. Malicorne hurried forward, and received it trembling with delight. But after having received it, De Guiche observed that he still awaited something further.

"Patience, Monsieur!" he said to Malicorne; "the Chevalier de Lorraine was there, and I feared an utter failure if I asked too much at once. Wait until I return. Adieu!"

"Adieu, Monsieur the Count; a thousand thanks!" said Malicorne.

"Send Manicamp to me. By the way, Monsieur, is it true that Mademoiselle de la Vallière is lame?"

As De Guiche said this, a horse drew up behind him; and on turning round he noticed that Bragelonne, who had just at that moment entered the courtyard, turned suddenly pale. The poor lover had heard the remark, which however was not the case with Malicorne, for he was already beyond the reach of the count's voice.

"Why is Louise's name spoken here?" Raoul asked himself; "oh! let not De Wardes, who stands smiling yonder, even say a word about her in my presence."

"Now, gentlemen," exclaimed the Comte de Guiche, "forward!"

At this moment the prince, who had completed his toilet, appeared at the window, and was immediately saluted by the acclamations of the whole escort; and ten minutes afterwards, banners, scarfs, and plumes were fluttering and waving in the air, as the cavalcade galloped away.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT HAVRE.

This brilliant and gay company, animated with such varied feelings, arrived at Havre four days after their departure from Paris. It was about five o'clock in the afternoon, and no intelligence had yet been received of Madame. They were soon engaged in quest of apartments; but the greatest confusion immediately ensued among the masters, and violent quarrels among their attendants. In the midst of all this disorder the Comte de Guiche fancied that he recognized Manicamp. It was, indeed, Manicamp himself; but as Malicorne had taken possession of his very best costume, he had not been able to get any other than a suit of violet velvet trimmed with silver. De Guiche recognized him as much by his dress as by his features, for he had very frequently seen Manicamp in this violet suit, which was his last resource. Manicamp presented himself to the count under an arch of torches, which set fire to rather than illuminated the gate by which Havre is entered, and which is situated close to the tower of Francis I. The count, remarking the woe-begone expression of Manicamp's face, could not resist laughing. "Well, my poor Manicamp," he exclaimed, "how violet you look! Are you in mourning?"

"Yes," replied Manicamp, "I am in mourning."

"For whom, or for what?"

"For my blue and gold suit, which has disappeared, and in the place of which I could find nothing but this;

and I was even obliged to economize, in order to get possession of it."

"Indeed?"

"It is singular you should be astonished at that, since you leave me without any money."

"At all events, here you are, and that is the principal thing."

"By the most horrible roads."

"Where are you lodging?"

"Lodging?"

"Yes."

"I am not lodging anywhere."

De Guiche began to laugh. "Well, where do you intend to lodge?"

"Where you lodge"

"But I don't know where *that* is."

"What do you mean by saying you don't know?"

"Why, how is it likely I should know where I am to stay?"

"Have you not secured a hotel?"

"I?"

"Yes, you or the prince."

"Neither of us has thought of it. Havre is of considerable size, I suppose; and provided I can get a stable for a dozen horses, and a suitable house in a good quarter —"

"Oh, there are some very excellent houses."

"Well, then —"

"But not for us."

"What do you mean by saying not for us? — for whom, then?"

"For the English, of course."

"For the English?"

"Yes; the houses are all taken."

"By whom?"

"By the Duke of Buckingham."

"I beg your pardon!" said De Guiche, whose attention this name had awakened.

"Yes, my friend, by the Duke of Buckingham. His Grace has been preceded by a courier, who arrived here three days ago, and immediately secured all the houses fit for habitation which the town possesses."

"Come, come, Manicamp, let us understand each other."

"Well, what I have told you is clear enough, it seems to me."

"But surely Buckingham does not occupy the whole of Havre?"

"He certainly does not occupy it, since he has not yet landed; but when once landed, he will occupy it."

"Oh! oh!"

"It is quite clear you are not acquainted with the English; they have a perfect rage for monopolizing everything."

"That may be; but a man who has the whole of one house contents himself with that, and does not require two."

"Yes; but two men?"

"Be it so; for two men two houses, or four, or six, or ten, if you like; but there are a hundred houses at Havre."

"Yes, and all the hundred are let."

"Impossible!"

"What an obstinate fellow you are! I tell you Buckingham has hired all the houses surrounding the one which her Majesty the Queen-dowager of England and the princess her daughter will inhabit."

"Well, now, he is an extraordinary man," said De Wardes, caressing his horse's neck.

"Such is the case, however, Monsieur."

"You are quite sure of it, M. de Manicamp?" and as

he put this question he looked slyly at De Guiche, as though to sound him upon the degree of confidence to be placed in his friend's state of mind.

Meanwhile the night had closed in, and the torches, pages, attendants, squires, horses, and carriages blocked up the gate and the square; the torches were reflected in the channel, which the rising tide was gradually filling, while on the other side of the jetty might be perceived groups of curious lookers-on, consisting of sailors and townspeople, who seemed anxious to miss nothing of the spectacle.

Amid all this hesitation, Bragelonne, as though a perfect stranger to the scene, remained on his horse somewhat in the rear of De Guiche, and watched the rays of light reflected in the water, inhaling with delight the sea-breezes, and listening to the waves which broke noisily upon the pebbles and the sea-weed of the strand, dashing the spray into the air with a roar which echoed in the distance.

"But really," exclaimed De Guiche, "what could have been Buckingham's motive for securing such a supply of lodgings?"

"Yes," demanded De Wardes; "what reason has he?"

"A very excellent one," replied Manicamp.

"You know what it is, then?"

"I fancy I do."

"Tell us, then."

"Bend your head down towards me."

"What! can it not be said except in secrecy?"

"You shall judge of that yourself."

"Very well." De Guiche bent down.

"Love," said Manicamp.

"I do not understand you at all."

"Say, rather, you cannot understand me *yet*."

"Explain yourself."

"Very well! it is quite certain, Monsieur the Count, that his royal Highness will be the most unfortunate of husbands."

"What do you mean? The Duke of Buckingham —"

"That name brings ill omen to princes of the house of France."

"And so the duke —"

"Is madly in love with the young Madame, so the rumor runs, and will have no one approach her but himself."

De Guiche colored. "Thank you, thank you," said he to Manicamp, grasping his hand. Then, recovering himself, he added, "For heaven's sake, Manicamp, be careful that this design of Buckingham's does not reach the ears of any Frenchman here; for if so, the sun of this country will shine on swords which do not fear English steel."

"After all," said Manicamp, "I have had no satisfactory proof given me of the love in question, and it may be no more than an idle tale."

"No, no," said De Guiche, "it must be the truth;" and despite his command over himself, he clenched his teeth.

"Well," said Manicamp, "after all, what does it matter to you? What does it matter to me whether the prince is to be what the late king was? Buckingham the father for the queen, Buckingham the son for the young princess."

"Manicamp! Manicamp!"

"It is a fact; or, at least, everybody says so."

"Silence!" said the count.

"But why silence?" said De Wardes; "it is a highly creditable circumstance for the French nation. Are not you of my opinion, M. de Bragelonne?"

"To what circumstance do you allude?" inquired Bragelonne, with an abstracted air.

"That the English should render homage to the beauty of our queens and our princesses."

"Pardon me, but I have not been paying attention to what has passed; will you oblige me by explaining?"

"There is no doubt it was necessary that Buckingham the father should come to Paris, in order that his Majesty King Louis XIII. should perceive that his wife was one of the most beautiful women of the French Court; and it seems necessary, at the present time, that Buckingham the son should consecrate, in his turn, by the devotion of his worship, the beauty of a princess who has French blood in her veins. It will henceforth confer a title of beauty to have inspired love across the sea."

"Monsieur," replied Bragelonne, "I do not like to hear such matters treated so lightly. Gentlemen as we are, we should be careful guardians of the honor of our queens and our princesses. If we jest at them, what will our servants do?"

"Ah, Monsieur," said De Wardes, whose ears tingled at the remark, "how am I to understand that?"

"In any way you choose, Monsieur," replied Bragelonne, coldly.

"Bragelonne, Bragelonne!" murmured De Guiche.

"M. de Wardes!" exclaimed Manicamp, noticing that the young man had spurred his horse close to the side of Raoul.

"Messieurs, Messieurs," said De Guiche, "do not set such an example in public, in the street too. De Wardes, you are wrong."

"Wrong! in what way, may I ask you?"

"You are wrong, Monsieur, because you are always speaking ill of some one or something" replied Raoul, with undisturbed composure.

"Be indulgent, Raoul!" said De Guiche, in an undertone.

"Pray do not think of fighting," said Manicamp, "before you have rested yourselves; for in that case you will not be able to do much."

"Come, come," said De Guiche, "forward, Messieurs!" and breaking through the horses and attendants, he cleared the way for himself through the crowd towards the centre of the square, followed by the whole cavalcade. A large gateway leading to a courtyard was open. De Guiche entered this courtyard; and Bragelonne, De Wardes, Manicamp, and three or four other gentlemen followed him. A sort of council of war was held, and the means to be employed for saving the dignity of the embassy were deliberated upon. Bragelonne was of opinion that the right of priority should be respected, while De Wardes suggested that the town should be sacked. This latter proposition appeared to Manicamp somewhat rash, he proposing instead that they should sleep on the matter. This was the wisest thing to do; but, unhappily, to follow his advice, two things only were wanting, — namely, a house and beds.

De Guiche considered for a while, and then said aloud, "Let him who loves me, follow me!"

"The attendants also?" inquired a page who had approached the group.

"Every one!" exclaimed the impetuous young man. "Manicamp, show us the way to the house destined for her royal Highness's residence."

Without in any way divining the count's project, his friends followed him, accompanied by a crowd of people, whose acclamations and delight seemed a happy omen for the success of the still uncomprehended project which these ardent young men were pursuing. The wind was blowing stiffly from the harbor, and moaning in fitful gusts.

CHAPTER XIV.

AT SEA.

THE following day was somewhat more calm, although the wind still continued to blow. The sun had, however, risen through a bank of reddened clouds, tinging with its crimson rays the crests of the black waves. Watch was impatiently kept from the different look-outs. Towards eleven o'clock in the morning a ship, with sails full set, was signalled; two others followed at the distance of about half a knot. They approached like arrows shot from the bow of a sturdy archer, and yet the sea ran so high that their speed took nothing from the rolling of the billows in which the vessels were plunging first in one direction and then in another. The English fleet was soon recognized by the lines of the ships and by the color of their pennants; the one which had the princess on board and carried the admiral's flag preceded the others.

The rumor now spread that the princess was arriving. The entire French Court ran to the harbor, while the quays and jetties were soon covered with crowds of people. Two hours afterward, the other vessels had overtaken the flag-ship; and the three, not venturing perhaps to enter the narrow entrance of the harbor, cast anchor between Havre and La Hève. When this manœuvre had been accomplished, the vessel which bore the admiral saluted France with twelve discharges of cannon, which were returned, shot for shot, from Fort Francis I. Immediately afterward a hundred boats were

launched; they were draped with the richest fabrics, and were destined for the conveyance of the French nobility to the vessels at anchor. But when it was observed that even inside the harbor the boats were tossed to and fro, and that beyond the jetty the waves rose mountains high, dashing upon the strand with a terrible uproar, it was easily seen that not one of those frail boats would be able to make a fourth part of the distance between the shore and the vessels at anchor without being swamped. A pilot-boat, however, notwithstanding the wind and the sea, was getting ready to leave the harbor to place itself at the disposal of the English admiral.

De Guiche, who had been looking among the different boats for one stronger than the others, which might offer a chance of reaching the English vessels, perceiving the pilot-boat getting ready to start, said to Raoul: "Do you not think, Raoul, that intelligent and vigorous men like us ought to be ashamed to retreat before the brute force of wind and waves?"

"That is precisely the reflection I was silently making to myself," replied Bragelonne.

"Shall we get into that boat, then, and push off? Will you come, De Wardes?"

"Take care, or you will get drowned," said Manicamp.

"And for no purpose," said De Wardes; "for with the wind dead against you, as it will be, you will never reach the vessels."

"You decline, then?"

"Assuredly I do. I would willingly risk and lose my life in an encounter with men," he said, glancing at Bragelonne; "but as to fighting with oars against waves, I have no taste for that."

"And for myself," said Manicamp, "even were I to succeed in reaching the ships, I should not be indifferent

to the loss of the only good dress which I have left, — since salt water would splash and spoil it."

"You, then, decline also?" exclaimed De Guiche.

"Decidedly I do; I beg you to understand that most distinctly."

"But," exclaimed De Guiche, "look, De Wardes, — look, Manicamp, look! Yonder the princesses are gazing at us from the poop of the admiral's vessel."

"An additional reason, my dear fellow, why we should not make ourselves ridiculous by taking a bath while they are looking on."

"Is that your last word, Manicamp?"

"Yes."

"And yours, De Wardes?"

"Yes."

"Then I will go alone."

"Not so," said Raoul, "for I shall accompany you; I thought that was understood."

The fact is, that while Raoul, unimpassioned, had coolly measured the risk to be run, and had seen how imminent the danger was, he was yet willing to accept a peril from which De Wardes had recoiled.

The boat was about to set off when De Guiche called to the pilot. "Holloa, the boat!" said he; "we want two places;" and wrapping five or six pistoles in paper he threw them from the quay into the boat.

"It seems you are not afraid of salt water, young gentlemen," said the skipper.

"We are afraid of nothing," answered De Guiche.

"Come along, then!"

The pilot came alongside; and the two young men, one after the other, with equal agility jumped into the boat. "Courage, my men!" said De Guiche. "There are twenty pistoles left in this purse; and as soon as we reach the

admiral's vessel they are yours." The sailors bent themselves to their oars, and the boat bounded over the crest of the waves.

The interest taken in this hazardous expedition was universal; the whole population of Havre crowded on the jetties, and every look was directed towards the boat. At one moment the frail craft remained suspended upon the crest of the foaming waves, then suddenly glided downward towards the bottom of a roaring abyss, where it seemed utterly lost. Nevertheless, at the end of an hour's struggling with the waves, it reached the spot where the admiral's vessel was anchored, and from the side of which two boats had already been despatched to their aid.

Upon the quarter-deck of the flag-ship, sheltered by a canopy of velvet and ermine, which was suspended by stout supports, Madame Henrietta, the queen-dowager, and the young princess — with the admiral, the Duke of Norfolk, standing beside them — watched with alarm this slender boat, at one moment carried to the heavens, and the next buried beneath the waves, against whose dark sail the noble figures of the two French gentlemen stood forth in relief like two luminous apparitions. The crew, leaning against the bulwarks and clinging to the shrouds, cheered the courage of the two daring young men, the skill of the pilot, and the strength of the sailors. They were received at the side of the vessel with a shout of triumph. The Duke of Norfolk, a handsome young man, from twenty-six to twenty-eight years of age, advanced to meet them. De Guiche and Bragelonne lightly mounted the ladder on the starboard side, and, conducted by the Duke of Norfolk, approached to offer their homage to the princesses. Respect, and yet more a certain apprehension for which he could not account, had hitherto restrained the Comte de Guiche from look-

ing at the young princess attentively, who however had observed him immediately, and had asked her mother, "Is not that Monsieur in the boat yonder?" Madame Henrietta, who knew Monsieur better than her daughter did, had smiled at the mistake her vanity had led her into, and had answered, "No, it is only M. de Guiche, his favorite." The princess, at this reply, had been obliged to check an instinctive tenderness of feeling which the courage displayed by the count had awakened.

At the very moment the princess had put this question to her mother, De Guiche had at last summoned courage to raise his eyes to her, and could compare the original with the portrait he had so lately seen. No sooner had he remarked her fair face, her eyes so full of animation, her beautiful brown hair, her expressive lips, and that gesture, so eminently royal, which seemed to thank and to encourage him at one and the same time, than he was for a moment so overcome with emotion that had it not been for Raoul, on whose arm he leaned, he would have tottered. His friend's amazed look and the encouraging gesture of the queen restored De Guiche to his self-possession. In a few words he explained his mission, told how he had become the envoy of his royal Highness, and saluted, according to their rank and the reception they gave him, the admiral and the different English noblemen who were grouped around the princesses.

Raoul was then presented, and was most graciously received. The part that the Comte de la Fère had taken in the restoration of King Charles II. was known to all; and, more than that, it was the count who had been charged with the negotiation of the marriage by reason of which the granddaughter of Henry IV. was now returning to France. Raoul spoke English perfectly, and constituted himself his friend's interpreter with the young

English noblemen, who were indifferently acquainted with the French language.

At this moment a young man came forward, of extremely handsome features, whose dress and arms were remarkable for their rich magnificence. He approached the princesses, who were engaged in conversation with the Duke of Norfolk, and in a voice which ill concealed his impatience, said, "My ladies, it is now time to go ashore."

The young princess rose from her seat at this invitation, and was about to take the hand which the young nobleman had extended to her with an eagerness which arose from a variety of motives, when the admiral advanced between them, observing: "A moment, if you please, my Lord Buckingham. It is not possible for ladies to disembark just now, the sea is too rough; but it is probable the wind may abate towards four o'clock, and the landing will not be effected, therefore, until this evening."

"Allow me, my Lord," said Buckingham, with an irritation of manner which he did not seek to disguise. "You detain these ladies, and you have no right to do so. One of them, alas! now belongs to France, and you perceive that France claims them by the voice of her ambassadors;" and at the same moment he indicated Raoul and De Guiche, whom he saluted.

"I cannot suppose that it enters into the intentions of these gentlemen to expose the lives of the princesses," replied the admiral.

"My Lord, these gentlemen arrived here safely, notwithstanding the wind; allow me to believe that the danger will not be greater for these ladies when the wind will be in their favor."

"These gentlemen are very courageous," said the admiral. "You may have observed that there was on shore

a great number of persons who did not venture to accompany them. Moreover, the desire which they had to pay their homage with the least possible delay to Madame and her illustrious mother induced them to brave the sea, which is very tempestuous to day, even for sailors. These gentlemen, however, whom I recommend as an example for my officers to follow, can hardly be so for these ladies."

Madame glanced at the Comte de Guiche, and perceived that his face was burning with confusion. This look had escaped Buckingham, who had eyes for nothing but watching Norfolk, of whom he was evidently very jealous, and seemed anxious to remove the princesses from the deck of a vessel where the admiral reigned supreme.

"In that case," returned Buckingham, "I appeal to Madame herself."

"And I, my Lord," retorted the admiral, "appeal to my own conscience, and to my own sense of responsibility. I have undertaken to convey Madame safe and sound to France, and I shall keep my promise."

"Yet, sir —" continued Buckingham.

"My Lord, permit me to remind you that I alone command here."

"Are you aware what you are saying, my Lord?" replied Buckingham, haughtily.

"Perfectly so, and I repeat it. I alone command here: all yield obedience to me; the sea and the winds, the ships and men too."

This remark was made in a dignified and authoritative manner. Raoul observed its effect upon Buckingham, who trembled from head to foot, and leaned against one of the poles of the canopy to prevent himself from falling; his eyes became bloodshot, and the hand which he did not need for his support wandered towards the hilt of his sword.

"My Lord," said the queen, "permit me to observe that I agree in every particular with the advice of the Duke of Norfolk; even if the heavens, instead of being clouded as they are at the present moment, were perfectly serene and propitious, we could afford to bestow a few hours upon the officer who has conducted us so successfully, and with such extreme attention, to the French coast, where he is to take leave of us."

Buckingham, instead of replying, seemed to seek counsel from the expression of Madame's face. She, however, half concealed beneath the curtains of velvet and gold which sheltered her, had not listened to the dispute, having been occupied in watching the Comte de Guiche, who was conversing with Raoul. This was a fresh blow for Buckingham, who fancied he perceived in Madame Henrietta's look a deeper feeling than that of curiosity. He withdrew, almost tottering in his gait, and nearly stumbled against the mainmast.

"The duke has not acquired a steady footing yet," said the queen-mother, in French; "and that is doubtless his reason for wishing to find himself on firm land again."

The young man, overhearing this remark, turned suddenly pale, and letting his hands fall in great discouragement by his side, retired, mingling in one sigh his old affection and his new hatreds. The admiral, however, without taking any further notice of Buckingham's ill-humor, led the princesses into the quarter-deck cabin, where dinner was served with a magnificence worthy in every respect of his guests. The admiral seated himself at the right hand of the princess, and placed the Comte de Guiche on her left. This was the place Buckingham usually occupied; and when he entered the cabin, how profound was his unhappiness at seeing himself banished by etiquette from the presence of the lady to whom he

owed respect, to a position inferior to that which by his rank he was entitled to occupy. De Guiche, on the other hand, paler still perhaps from happiness than his rival was from anger, seated himself tremblingly next the princess, whose silken robe, as it lightly touched him, caused a tremor of inconceivable happiness to pass through his whole frame.

The repast finished, Buckingham darted forward to hand Madame Henrietta from the table; but this time it was De Guiche's turn to give the duke a lesson. "Have the goodness, my Lord," said he, "from this moment not to interpose between her royal Highness and myself. From this moment, indeed, her royal Highness belongs to France; and when her royal Highness honors me by touching my hand, it is the hand of his royal Highness Monsieur, the brother of the King of France, that she touches"

And saying this, he presented his hand to Madame Henrietta with such marked timidity, and at the same time with a nobleness of mien so intrepid, that a murmur of admiration rose from the English, while a groan of despair escaped from Buckingham's lips.

Raoul, who loved, comprehended it all. He fixed upon his friend one of those profound looks which a friend or a mother can alone extend, either as a protector or a guardian, over the child or the friend about to stray from the right path.

About two o'clock in the afternoon the sun shone forth, the wind subsided, the sea became smooth as a crystal mirror, and the fog which had shrouded the coast disappeared like a veil withdrawn from before it. The smiling hills of France then appeared to the view, with their numerous white houses rendered more conspicuous by the bright green of the trees or the clear blue sky.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TENTS.

The admiral, as has been seen, had determined to pay no further attention to Buckingham's threatening glances and fits of passion. In fact, from the moment they left England he had gradually and quietly accustomed himself to it. De Guiche had not yet in any way remarked the animosity which appeared to influence that young nobleman against him, but he felt instinctively that there could be no sympathy between himself and the favorite of Charles II. The queen-mother, with greater experience and calmer judgment, perceived the exact position of affairs, and as she discerned its danger was prepared to meet it whenever the proper moment should arrive. That moment came. Quiet had been everywhere restored, except in Buckingham's heart, and he in his impatience addressed himself to the princess in a low voice: "For heaven's sake, Madame, I implore you to hasten your disembarkation. Do you not perceive how that foppish Duke of Norfolk is killing me with his attentions and devotions to you?"

Henrietta heard this remark. She smiled, and without turning her head towards him, but giving only to the tone of her voice that inflection of gentle reproach and languid impertinence with which coquetry so well knows how to give compliance while yet seeming to utter a prohibition, she murmured, "I have already told you, my Lord, that you must have taken leave of your senses."

Not a single detail, we have already said, escaped Raoul's attention: he had heard both Buckingham's entreaty and the princess's reply; he had observed Buckingham draw back, had heard his deep sigh, and saw him pass his hand across his face. He understood everything, and trembled as he reflected on the position of affairs, and the state of the minds of those about him. At last the admiral, with studied delay, gave the final directions for the departure of the boats. Buckingham heard the directions given with such an exhibition of delight that a stranger would almost have imagined the young man's reason was affected. At the command of the Duke of Norfolk, a large boat or barge, decked with flags and capable of holding twenty rowers and fifteen passengers, was slowly lowered from the side of the admiral's vessel. This truly royal barge was carpeted with velvet, and decorated with coverings embroidered with the arms of England and with garlands of flowers; for at that time the language of allegory was freely employed even on the occasion of a political alliance.

No sooner was the barge afloat — the rowers, with oars uplifted, awaiting, like soldiers presenting arms, the embarkation of the princess — than Buckingham ran forward to the ladder to take his place in it. But the queen stopped him. "My Lord," she said, "it is hardly becoming that you should allow my daughter and myself to land, without having previously ascertained that our apartments are properly prepared. I beg your Lordship to be good enough therefore to precede us to Havre, and to make sure that everything is in proper order on our arrival."

This was a fresh disappointment for the duke, and still more so since it was so unexpected. He stammered, colored violently, but could not reply He had thought

he might be able to keep near the princess during the passage to the shore, and by this means to enjoy to the very last moment the brief period which fortune still reserved for him. The order, however, was explicit; and the admiral, who heard it given, immediately called out, "Launch the ship's gig!" The order was executed with that celerity which distinguishes every manœuvre on board a man-of-war.

Buckingham, in utter hopelessness, cast a look of despair at the princess, of supplication towards the queen, and directed a glance full of anger towards the admiral. The princess pretended not to notice him, while the queen turned aside her head, and the admiral laughed outright, at the sound of which Buckingham seemed ready to spring upon him.

The queen-mother rose, and, with a tone of authority, said, "Pray, set off, sir!"

The young duke hesitated, looked around him, and with a last effort, half choked by contending emotions, said, "And you, Messieurs, M. de Guiche and M. de Bragelonne, do not you accompany me?"

De Guiche bowed and said, "Both M. de Bragelonne and myself await her Majesty's orders; whatever may be the commands she imposes on us, we shall obey them." Saying this, he looked towards the princess, who cast down her eyes.

"Your Grace will remember," said the queen, "that M. de Guiche is here to represent Monsieur; it is he who will do the honors of France, as you have done those of England. His presence, then, cannot be dispensed with; besides, we owe him this slight favor for the courage he displayed in venturing to seek us in such terrible weather."

Buckingham opened his lips as if about to speak; but whether thoughts or expressions failed him, not a syllable

escaped them; and turning away, as though he were out of his mind, he leaped from the vessel into the boat. The sailors were just in time to catch hold of him and to steady themselves, for his weight and the rebound had almost upset the boat.

"Surely my Lord is mad," said the admiral aloud to Raoul.

"I am uneasy on my Lord's account," replied Bragelonne.

While the boat was moving towards the shore, the duke kept his eyes immovably fixed upon the admiral's ship, like a miser torn away from his coffers, or like a mother separated from her child, about to be led away to death. No one, however, acknowledged his signals, his gesticulations, or his pitiful gestures. In very anguish of mind he sank down on a seat, burying his hands in his hair; while the boat, impelled by the exertions of the heedless sailors, flew over the waves. On his arrival he was in such a state of apathy that had he not been received at the harbor by the messenger whom he had directed to precede him as quartermaster, he would hardly have been able to ask his way. Having once, however, reached the house which had been set apart for him, he shut himself up like Achilles in his tent.

The barge bearing the princesses quitted the admiral's vessel at the very moment Buckingham had landed. It was followed by another boat, filled with officers, courtiers, and zealous friends. The whole population of Havre, having hastily embarked in fishing-boats or flat-boats or long Norman pinnaces, set off to meet the royal barge. The cannon from the forts fired salutes, which were returned by the flag-ship and the two other vessels, and the clouds of flame from the belching mouths of the cannon floated in white vapor over the waves, and then disappeared in the azure of the sky.

The princess landed at the steps of the quay. Bands of gay music greeted her arrival, and accompanied every step she took. While she was passing through the centre of the town, and treading beneath her dainty feet the richest carpets and the gayest flowers which had been strewn upon the ground, De Guiche and Raoul, escaping from their English friends, hastened rapidly through the town and towards the place intended for the residence of the princess.

"Let us hurry forward," said Raoul to De Guiche; "for if I read Buckingham's character aright, he will create some disturbance when he learns the result of our deliberations of yesterday."

"Never fear!" said the count. "De Wardes is there, who is determination itself; while Manicamp is the very personification of gentleness."

De Guiche was not, however, the less diligent on that account, and five minutes afterward they were in sight of the Hôtel de Ville. The first thing which struck them was the number of persons assembled in front of the square. "Good!" said De Guiche; "our apartments, I see, are prepared."

In fact, in front of the Hôtel de Ville, upon the wide open space before it, eight of the most gorgeous tents had been raised, surmounted by the flags of France and England united. The hotel was surrounded by tents, as by a girdle of variegated colors; ten pages and a dozen mounted troopers, who had been given to the ambassadors for an escort, mounted guard before the tents. It had a singularly curious effect, almost fairy-like in its appearance. These improvised tents had been constructed during the night-time. Fitted up, within and without, with the richest materials that De Guiche had been able to procure in Havre, they completely encircled the Hôtel

de Ville, — that is to say, the abode of the princess. They were joined one to another by silken ropes, guarded by sentinels; so that Buckingham's plans were completely subverted, if those plans had really been to reserve for himself and his Englishmen the approaches to the Hôtel de Ville. The only passage which gave access to the steps of the hotel, and which was not closed by this silken barricade, was guarded by two tents, resembling two pavilions, the doorways of both of which opened on this entrance. These two tents were destined for De Guiche and Raoul; in whose absence they were always to be occupied, that of De Guiche by De Wardes, and that of Raoul by Manicamp. Around these two tents, and the six others, a hundred officers, gentlemen, and pages, dazzling in their display of silk and gold, thronged like bees around a hive. Every one of them, their swords by their sides, was ready to obey the slightest sign either of De Guiche or Bragelonne, the leaders of the embassy.

At the very moment when the two young men appeared at the end of one of the streets leading to the square, they perceived crossing the square, at full gallop, a young man on horseback, whose costume was of surprising richness. He pushed hastily through the crowd of curious lookers-on, and at the sight of these unexpected erections uttered a cry of anger and dismay. It was Buckingham, who had awakened from his stupor, in order to adorn himself with a resplendent costume, and to await the arrival of the princess and the queen-mother at the Hôtel de Ville. At the entrance to the tents the soldier barred his passage, and his further progress was arrested. Buckingham, completely infuriated, raised his whip; but his arm was seized by two of the officers. Of the two guardians of the tent, only one was there. De Wardes was inside the Hôtel de Ville,

engaged in attending to the execution of some orders given by De Guiche. At the noise made by Buckingham, Manicamp, who was indolently reclining upon the cushions at the doorway of one of the two tents, rose with his usual indifference, and perceiving that the disturbance continued, made his appearance from underneath the curtains. "What is the matter," he said, in a gentle tone of voice, "and who is it making this disturbance?"

It so happened that at the moment he began to speak silence had just been restored, and although his voice was very soft and gentle in its tone, every one heard his question. Buckingham turned round, and looked at the tall, thin figure and the listless countenance of his questioner. Probably the personal appearance of Manicamp, who was moreover dressed very plainly as we have said, did not inspire him with much respect, for he replied disdainfully, "Who may you be, Monsieur?"

Manicamp, leaning on the arm of a gigantic trooper, as firm as the pillar of a cathedral, replied in the same tranquil tone, "And you, Monsieur?"

"I am his Grace the Duke of Buckingham. I have hired all the houses which surround the Hôtel de Ville, where my business is; and as these houses are let, they belong to me; and as I hired them in order to preserve the right of free access to the Hôtel de Ville, you have no right to prevent my passage."

"But who prevents you from passing, Monsieur?" inquired Manicamp.

"Your sentinels."

"Because you wish to pass on horseback, Monsieur, and orders have been given to let only persons pass on foot."

"No one has any right to give orders here, except myself," said Buckingham.

"How so, Monsieur?" inquired Manicamp, with his soft voice; "will you do me the favor to explain this enigma to me?"

"Because, as I have told you, I have hired all the houses looking on the square."

"We are very well aware of that, since nothing but the square itself has been left for us."

"You are mistaken, Monsieur; the square belongs to me, as well as the houses in it."

"Pardon me, Monsieur, but you are mistaken there. In our country, we say, The highway belongs to the king; therefore this square is his Majesty's; and consequently, as we are the king's ambassadors, the square belongs to us."

"I have already asked you who you are, Monsieur," exclaimed Buckingham, exasperated at the coolness of his interlocutor.

"My name is Manicamp," replied the young man, in a voice whose tones were as harmonious and sweet as the notes of an Æolian harp.

Buckingham shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, and said, "When I hired these houses which surround the Hôtel de Ville, the square was unoccupied. These barracks obstruct my sight; let them be removed!"

A hoarse and angry murmur passed through the crowd of listeners at these words. De Guiche arrived at this moment; he pushed through the crowd which separated him from Buckingham, and followed by Raoul arrived on the scene of action from one side, just as De Wardes arrived from the other. "Pardon me, my Lord," said he; "but if you have any complaint to make, have the goodness to address it to me, inasmuch as it was I who supplied the plans for the construction of these tents."

"Moreover, I would beg you to observe, Monsieur,

that the term 'barrack' is objected to," added Manicamp, graciously.

"You were saying, Monsieur —" continued De Guiche.

"I was saying, Monsieur the Count," resumed Buckingham, in a tone of anger still perceptible, although in some measure moderated by the presence of an equal, "I was saying that it is impossible for these tents to remain where they are."

"Impossible!" exclaimed De Guiche, "and for what reason?"

"Because they annoy me."

A movement of impatience escaped De Guiche, but a warning glance from Raoul restrained him.

"You should the less object to them, Monsieur, on account of the abuse of priority you have permitted yourself to exercise."

"Abuse!"

"Most assuredly. You commission a messenger, who hires in your name the whole of the town of Havre, without considering the members of the French Court who would be sure to arrive here to meet Madame. Your Grace will admit that this is hardly friendly conduct in the representative of a friendly nation."

"The right of possession belongs to him who is first on the spot."

"Not in France, Monsieur."

"Why not in France?"

"Because France is a country where politeness is observed."

"Which means —" exclaimed Buckingham, in so violent a manner that those who were present drew back, expecting an immediate collision.

"Which means, Monsieur," answered De Guiche, turning pale, "that I have caused these tents to be raised as

habitations for myself and my friends, as a shelter for the ambasssadors of France, as the only place of refuge which your unreasonableness has left us in the town; and that I and those who are with me shall remain in them, at least until a force more powerful and more authoritative than your own shall dismiss me from them."

"In other words, until we are overruled, as the lawyers say," observed Manicamp, blandly.

"I know an authority, Monsieur, which I trust will be such as you wish for," said Buckingham, placing his hand on the hilt of his sword.

At this moment, and as the goddess of Discord, inflaming the minds of all, was about to direct their swords against one another, Raoul gently placed his hand on Buckingham's shoulder. "One word, my Lord!" he said.

"My right, my right, first of all!" exclaimed the fiery young man.

"It is precisely upon that point I wish to have the honor of addressing a word to you," said Raoul.

"Very well, Monsieur, but let your remarks be brief."

"One question is all I would ask; you can hardly expect me to be briefer."

"Speak! I am listening."

"Are you, or is the Duke of Orleans, going to marry the granddaughter of Henry IV.?"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Buckingham, retreating a few steps, quite bewildered.

"Have the goodness to answer me," persisted Raoul, calmly.

"Do you mean to ridicule me, Monsieur?" demanded Buckingham.

"Your question is a sufficient answer for me. You admit, then, that it is not you who are going to marry the princess."

"You know it perfectly well, Monsieur, I should imagine."

"I beg your pardon, but your conduct has been such as to leave it not altogether certain."

"Proceed, Monsieur; what do you mean to intimate?"

Raoul approached the duke. "Are you aware, my Lord," he said, lowering his voice, "that your extravagances very much resemble the excesses of jealousy? These jealous fits with respect to any woman are not becoming in one who is neither her lover nor her husband; and I am sure you will admit that my remark applies with still greater force when the lady in question is a princess of royal blood."

"Monsieur," exclaimed Buckingham, "do you mean to insult Madame Henrietta?"

"Be careful, my Lord," replied Bragelonne, coldly, "for it is you who insult her. A little while since, when on board the admiral's ship, you annoyed the queen, and exhausted the admiral's patience. I was observing you, my Lord; and at first I concluded you were not in possession of your senses, but I have since surmised the real character of your madness."

"Monsieur!" exclaimed Buckingham.

"One moment more, for I have yet another word to add. I trust I am the only one of my companions who has guessed it."

"Are you aware, Monsieur," said Buckingham, trembling with mingled feelings of anger and uneasiness, — "are you aware that you are using language towards me which requires to be checked?"

"Weigh your words well, my Lord!" said Raoul, haughtily. "My nature is not such that its outbursts need checking; while you, on the contrary, are descended from a race whose passions are suspected by all true

Frenchmen. I repeat, therefore, for the second time, be careful!"

"Careful of what, may I ask? Do you presume to threaten me?'

"I am the son of the Comte de la Fère, my Lord Buckingham, and I never threaten, because I strike first. Therefore, understand me well, the threat that I hold out to you is this —"

Buckingham clenched his hands; but Raoul continued, as though he had not observed the movement: "At the very first word beyond the respect and deference due to her royal Highness, which you permit yourself to use towards her — Oh, be patient, M. de Buckingham! I am."

"You?"

"Certainly. So long as her royal Highness remained under the care of her English escort, I held my peace; but from the very moment she stepped on French ground, and now that we have received her in the name of the prince, I warn you that at the first mark of disrespect which you in your insane attachment may exhibit towards the royal house of France, I shall have one of two courses to follow: either to declare in the presence of every one the madness with which you are now affected, and get you ignominiously dismissed to England; or, if you prefer it, to run my dagger through your throat before the whole court. This second alternative seems to me the more convenient, and I think I shall hold to it."

Buckingham had become paler than the profusion of English lace around his neck. "M. de Bragelonne," he said, "is it, indeed, a gentleman who is speaking to me?"

"Yes; only the gentleman is speaking to a madman. Get cured, my Lord, and he will hold quite another language to you."

"But, M. de Bragelonne," murmured the duke, in a voice half choked, and putting his hand to his neck, "do you not see I am dying?"

"If your death were to take place at this moment, my Lord," replied Raoul, with unruffled composure, "I should indeed regard it as a great happiness, for this circumstance would prevent all kinds of evil remarks, not alone about yourself, but also about those illustrious persons whom your devotion is compromising in so absurd a manner."

"You are right, you are right," said the young man, beside himself. "Yes, yes; better to die than to suffer as I do at this moment!" and he grasped a beautiful dagger, the handle of which was inlaid with precious stones, and which he half drew from his breast.

Raoul thrust the duke's hand aside. "Be careful what you do!" he said. "If you do not kill yourself, you commit a ridiculous action, and if you do kill yourself, you sprinkle blood upon the nuptial robe of the princess of England."

Buckingham for a minute gasped for breath; during this interval his lips quivered, his features worked convulsively, and his eyes wandered, as though in delirium. Then suddenly, "M. de Bragelonne," he said, "I know nowhere a nobler mind than yours; you are the worthy son of the most perfect gentleman that ever lived. Keep your tents!" and he threw his arms round Raoul's neck.

All who were present, astounded at this conduct, — which was such as they could hardly have expected, considering the violence of the one adversary and the determination of the other, — began immediately to clap their hands, and a thousand cheers and joyful shouts arose from all sides. De Guiche, in his turn, embraced Buckingham, somewhat against his inclination; but, at all

events, he did embrace him. This was the signal for French and English to do the same; and they who until that moment had looked at each other with restless uncertainty, fraternized on the spot. In the mean time arrived the retinue of the princess, who but for Bragelonne would have found two armies in conflict and blood upon the flowers. All was quiet when the head of the procession appeared.

CHAPTER XVI.

NIGHT.

Concord had returned to resume its place amid the tents. English and French rivalled one another in their devotion and courteous attention to the illustrious travellers, and in politeness to one another. The English sent to the French baskets of flowers, of which they had made a plentiful provision to celebrate the arrival of the young princess; the French, in return, invited the English to a supper which was to be given the next day. Congratulations were poured in upon the princess everywhere during her journey. From the respect paid her on all sides, she seemed like a queen; and from the adoration of a few, she seemed like a goddess. The queen-mother gave the French the most affectionate reception. France was her native country, and she had suffered too much unhappiness in England to have made her forget France. She taught her daughter, then, by her own affection for it, to love a country where they had both been hospitably received, and where a brilliant future was opening before them.

After the public entry was over, and the spectators in the streets had somewhat dispersed, and the sound of the music and the cheering of the crowd could be heard no more; when the night had closed in, wrapping with its star-covered mantle the sea, the harbor, the town, and the surrounding country, still excited by the great event of the day, De Guiche returned to his

tent, and seated himself upon one of the stools with so profound an expression of distress that Bragelonne kept his eyes fixed on him until he heard him sigh, and then he approached him. The count had thrown himself back on his seat, leaning his shoulders against the wall of the tent, and remained thus, with his face buried in his hands and with heaving chest and restless limbs.

"You are suffering?" asked Raoul.

"Cruelly."

"Bodily, I suppose?"

"Yes; bodily."

"This has indeed been a harassing day," continued the young man, his eyes fixed upon his friend.

"Yes; a night's rest will restore me."

"Shall I leave you?"

"No; I wish to talk to you."

"You shall not speak to me, De Guiche, until you have first answered my questions."

"Proceed then."

"You will be frank with me?"

"As I always am."

"Can you imagine why Buckingham has been so violent?"

"I suspect why."

"Because he is in love with the princess, is it not?"

"One could almost swear it, to see him."

"You are mistaken; it is nothing of the kind."

"It is you who are mistaken, Raoul. I have read his distress in his eyes, in his every gesture and action, the whole day."

"You are a poet, my dear count, and find subjects for your muse everywhere."

"I can perceive love clearly enough."

"Where it does not exist."

"Nay, where it does exist."

"Do you not think you are deceiving yourself, De Guiche?"

"I am convinced of what I say," said the count.

"Now inform me, Count," asked Raoul, fixing a penetrating look upon him, "what has happened to render you so clear-sighted?"

Guiche hesitated for a moment, and then answered, "Self-love, I suppose."

"Self-love is a very long word, De Guiche."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that generally you are less out of spirits than seems to be the case this evening."

"I am fatigued."

"Listen to me, dear friend! We have been campaigners together; we have been on horseback for eighteen hours at a time, and our horses even, dying from sheer exhaustion or hunger, have fallen beneath us, and yet we have laughed at our mishaps. Believe me, it is not fatigue which saddens you to-night."

"It is annoyance, then."

"What annoyance?"

"That of this evening."

"The mad conduct of the Duke of Buckingham, do you mean?"

"Of course. Is it not vexatious for us, the representatives of our sovereign master, to see an Englishman wooing our future mistress, the second lady in the kingdom?"

"Yes, you're right; but I do not think any danger is to be apprehended from Buckingham."

"No; still, he is intrusive. Did he not, on his arrival here, almost succeed in creating a disturbance between the English and ourselves? And had it not been for you,

for your admirable prudence, for your singular firmness, swords would have been drawn in the very streets of the town."

"You observe, however, that he has changed."

"Yes, certainly; but it is that which amazes me so much. You spoke to him in a low tone of voice. What did you say to him? You think he loves her; you admit that such a passion does not give way readily. He does not love her, then!" De Guiche pronounced the last words with so marked an expression that Raoul raised his head. The noble countenance of the young man expressed a displeasure easy to read.

"What I said to him, Count," replied Raoul, "I will repeat to you. Listen to me! I said, 'Monsieur, you are regarding with wistful feelings and with most injurious desire the sister of your prince, her to whom you are not affianced, who is not, who can never be, anything to you; you are outraging those who, like ourselves, have come to seek a young girl to lead her to her husband.'"

"You spoke to him in that manner?" asked De Guiche, coloring.

"In those very terms. I even added more: 'How would you regard us,' I said, 'if you were to perceive among us a man mad enough, disloyal enough, to entertain sentiments other than those of the purest respect for a princess who is the destined wife of our master?'"

These words were so applicable to De Guiche that he turned pale, and, overcome by a sudden agitation, was barely able to stretch out one hand mechanically towards Raoul, while with the other he covered his eyes and face.

"But," continued Raoul, not interrupted by this demonstration of his friend, "Heaven be praised, the French, who are pronounced to be thoughtless and indiscreet, reckless even, are capable of bringing a calm and sound

judgment to bear on matters of such high importance. I added even more: 'Learn, my Lord Buckingham, that we gentlemen of France serve our kings by sacrificing for them our passions as well as our fortunes and our lives; and whenever it may chance to happen that the tempter suggests one of those vile thoughts which set the heart on fire, we extinguish that flame, even though it be quenched with our blood. Thus we save the honor of three at once,— our country's, our master's, and our own. It is thus that we act, your Grace; it is thus that every man of honor ought to act.' And that is the way, my dear Guiche," continued Raoul, "in which I addressed the Duke of Buckingham; and he submitted unresistingly to my arguments."

De Guiche, who had hitherto sat leaning forward while Raoul was speaking, drew himself up, his eyes glancing proudly. He seized Raoul's hand with his own feverish one; his cheeks, which had been as cold as ice, seemed on fire. "And you spoke right well," he said, in a voice half choked; "you are indeed a brave friend, Raoul. I thank you. And now, I entreat you, leave me to myself."

"Do you wish it?"

"Yes; I need repose. Many things have unsettled me to-day both in mind and body; when you return to-morrow I shall no longer be the same man."

"I leave you, then," said Raoul, and withdrew.

The count advanced a step towards his friend, and clasped him warmly in his arms; but in this friendly pressure Raoul could detect the nervous agitation of a great internal conflict.

The night was clear, starlit, and splendid; after the tempest the warmth of the sun had restored life, peace, and security everywhere. A few light fleecy clouds were floating in the heavens, and promised by their appearance

many days of beautiful weather, tempered by a gentle breeze from the east. Upon the large square in front of the hotel, the large shadows of the tents, intersected by the brilliant moonbeams, formed as it were a huge mosaic on the black and white flagstones. Soon the whole town was wrapped in slumber. A feeble light still glimmered in the princess's apartment, which looked out upon the square; and the soft rays from the expiring lamp seemed to resemble the calm sleep of a young girl, hardly yet sensible of existence, and in whom the flame of life sinks down as sleep steals over the body.

Bragelonne left the tent with the slow and measured step of a man curious to observe, but anxious not to be seen. Then, sheltered behind the thick curtains of his own tent, and embracing with a glance the whole square, he noticed that after a few moments the curtains of De Guiche's tent were agitated, and then drawn partially aside. Behind them he could perceive the shadow of De Guiche; his eyes, glistening in the obscurity, were fastened ardently upon the princess's drawing-room, which was partially lighted by the lamp in the inner room. That soft light which illumined the windows was the count's star. The fervent aspirations of his whole soul could be read in his eyes. Raoul, concealed in the shadow, divined the many passionate thoughts which established between the tent of the young ambassador and the balcony of the princess a mysterious and magical bond of sympathy, — a bond created by thoughts intensified by so much strength and persistence of will, that they must have caused dreams of love to descend upon the perfumed couch which the count with the eyes of his soul devoured so eagerly.

But De Guiche and Raoul were not the only watchers. The window of one of the houses looking on the square

was open too, — the window of the house where Buckingham resided. By the aid of the rays of light which issued from this latter window, the profile of the duke could be distinctly seen, as he indolently reclined upon the carved balcony with its velvet hangings; he also was breathing in the direction of the princess's balcony his devotion and the wild longing of his love.

Bragelonne could not resist smiling as, thinking of the princess, he said to himself, "Hers is indeed a heart well besieged;" and then added compassionately, his thoughts reverting to Monsieur, "and he is a husband well threatened too. It is a good thing for him that he is a prince of such high rank, and that he has an army to guard that which is his own." Bragelonne watched for some time the conduct of the two lovers; listened to the sonorous breathing of Manicamp, who snored as imperiously as though he had his blue and gold instead of his violet suit, and then turned towards the night breeze which bore to him the distant song of a nightingale; then, after having laid in a due provision of melancholy, another nocturnal malady, he retired to rest, thinking, with regard to his own love affair, that perhaps four or six eyes quite as ardent as those of De Guiche and Buckingham were coveting his own idol in the château at Blois. "And Mademoiselle de Montalais is by no means a very safe guardian," said he to himself, as he sighed aloud.

CHAPTER XVII.

FROM HAVRE TO PARIS.

THE next day the *fêtes* took place, with all the pomp and animation which the resources of the town and the natural disposition of men's minds could supply. During the last few hours spent in Havre every preparation for the departure had been made. After the princess had taken leave of the English fleet and for the last time had saluted the country in saluting its flag, she entered her carriage surrounded by a brilliant escort. De Guiche had hoped that the Duke of Buckingham would return with the admiral to England; but Buckingham succeeded in demonstrating to the queen that there would be great impropriety in allowing the princess to proceed to Paris almost entirely alone. As soon as it had been settled that Buckingham was to accompany the princess, the young duke selected a court of gentlemen and officers to form his own suite; so that it was almost an army which proceeded towards Paris, scattering gold, and exciting the liveliest demonstrations as they passed through the different towns and villages on the route.

The weather was very fine. France is a beautiful country, especially along the route by which the procession passed. Spring cast its flowers and its balmy foliage upon their path. Normandy, with its vast variety of vegetation, its blue skies and silver rivers, displayed itself in all the loveliness of a Paradise for the new sister of the

king. *Fêtes* and manifestations of delight greeted them everywhere along the line of march. De Guiche and Buckingham forgot everything, — De Guiche in his anxiety to prevent any fresh attempts on the part of the Englishman, and Buckingham in his desire to awaken in the heart of the princess a softer remembrance of the country to which the recollection of many happy days were attached. But, alas! the poor duke could perceive that the image of his dear England became from day to day more and more effaced in the princess's mind, in proportion as her affection for France became more deeply engraved on her heart. In fact, it was not difficult to perceive that his most devoted attention awakened no acknowledgment, and that the grace with which he rode one of his most fiery Yorkshire horses was thrown away; for it was only casually and by the merest accident that the princess's eyes were turned towards him. In vain did he try, in order to fix upon himself one of those looks roving carelessly around or bestowed elsewhere, to produce from the animal he rode its greatest display of strength, speed, temper, and address; in vain did he, by exciting his horse almost to madness, spur him, at the risk of dashing himself in pieces against the trees or of rolling in the ditches, over gates and barriers, or down the steep declivities of the hills. The princess, whose attention had been aroused by the noise, turned her head for a moment to observe the cause of it, and then, slightly smiling, again turned to her faithful guardians, Raoul and De Guiche, who were quietly riding at her carriage doors.

Then Buckingham felt himself a prey to all the tortures of jealousy; an unknown, unheard-of burning anguish glided into his veins, and laid siege to his heart. And then, as if to show that he knew the folly of his conduct,

and that he wished to redeem by the humblest submission his flights of absurdity, he mastered his horse, and compelled him, reeking with sweat and flecked with foam, to champ his bit close beside the carriage, amid the crowd of courtiers. Occasionally he obtained a word from the princess as a recompense, and yet this word seemed almost a reproach to him. "That is well, my Lord Buckingham," she said; "now you are reasonable." Or a word from Raoul: "Your Grace is killing your horse."

Buckingham listened patiently to Raoul; for he instinctively felt, without having had any proof that such was the case, that Raoul checked the display of De Guiche's feelings, and that, had it not been for Raoul, some mad act or proceeding, either of the count or of Buckingham himself, would have brought about an open rupture or a disturbance and perhaps banishment. From the moment of that notable conversation which the two young men had had in front of the tents at Havre, when Raoul had made the duke perceive the impropriety of his conduct, Buckingham had felt himself attracted towards Raoul almost in spite of himself. He often entered into conversation with him; and it was nearly always to talk to him either of his father or of D'Artagnan, their common friend, in whose praise Buckingham was almost as enthusiastic as Raoul. Raoul endeavored, as much as possible, to make the conversation turn upon this subject in De Wardes' presence, who had during the whole journey felt hurt at the superior position taken by Bragelonne, and especially by his influence over De Guiche.

De Wardes had that keen and observant penetration which all evil natures possess; he had immediately remarked De Guiche's melancholy, and the nature of his regard for the princess. Instead, however, of treating

the subject with the same reserve which Raoul had practised, instead of regarding with proper respect the obligations and duties of society, De Wardes resolutely attacked in the count that ever sounding chord of juvenile audacity and egotistical pride. It happened one evening, during a halt at Mantes, that while De Guiche and De Wardes were leaning against a barrier, engaged in conversation, Buckingham and Raoul were also talking together as they walked up and down. Manicamp was engaged in devoted attentions to the princesses, who already treated him without any reserve, on account of his pliant nature, his frank courtesy of manner, and his conciliatory disposition.

"Confess," said De Wardes to the count, "that you are really ill, and that your pedagogue has not succeeded in curing you."

"I do not understand you," said the count.

"And yet it is easy enough; you are dying of love."

"You are mad, De Wardes."

"Madness it would be, I admit, if the princess were really indifferent to your suffering; but she takes so much notice of it that she compromises herself, and I tremble lest, on our arrival at Paris, your pedagogue, M. de Bragelonne, may denounce both of you."

"For shame, De Wardes, again attacking Bragelonne!"

"Come, come, a truce to child's play!" replied the count's evil genius, in an undertone; "you know, as well as I do, what I mean. Besides, you must have observed how the princess's glance softens as she speaks to you; you can tell, by the very inflection of her voice, what pleasure she takes in listening to you, and can feel how thoroughly she appreciates the verses you recite to her. You cannot deny, too, that every morning she tells you how indifferently she slept the previous night."

"True, De Wardes, quite true; but what good is there in your telling me all that?"

"Is it not important to see things clearly?"

"No, no; not when the things I see are enough to drive one mad," and he turned uneasily in the direction of the princess, as if, while repelling the insinuations of De Wardes, he wished to find confirmation of them in her eyes.

"Stay, stay!" said De Wardes; "look! she calls you; do you understand? Profit by the occasion; the pedagogue is not here."

De Guiche could not resist; an invincible attraction drew him towards the princess. De Wardes smiled as he saw him withdraw.

"You are mistaken, Monsieur," said Raoul, suddenly leaping over the barrier against which, the previous moment, the two friends had been leaning; "the pedagogue is here, and has overheard you."

De Wardes, at the sound of Raoul's voice, which he recognized without having occasion to look at him, half drew his sword.

"Put up your sword," said Raoul; "you know perfectly well that until our journey is at an end every demonstration of that nature is useless. Sheath your sword, but likewise sheath your tongue. Why do you distil into the heart of the man you term your friend all the bitterness which infects your own? Toward myself you wish to arouse a feeling of hatred in a man of honor, — my father's friend and my own; and as for the count, you wish him to love one who is destined for your master. Really, Monsieur, I should regard you as a coward, and a traitor too, if I did not with greater justice regard you as a madman."

"Monsieur," exclaimed De Wardes, exasperated, "I was

not mistaken, I find, in terming you a pedagogue; the tone you assume, and the style which is peculiarly your own, is that of a Jesuit flogger, and not of a gentleman. Discontinue, I beg, whenever I am present, this style I complain of, and the tone also. I hate M. d'Artagnan because he was guilty of a cowardly act towards my father."

"You lie, Monsieur!" said Raoul, coolly.

"You give me the lie, Monsieur?" exclaimed De Wardes.

"Why not, if what you assert be untrue?"

"You give me the lie, and do not draw your sword?"

"I have resolved, Monsieur, not to kill you until we have delivered the princess to her husband."

"Kill me! Believe me, Monsieur, your schoolmaster's rod does not kill so easily."

"No," replied Raoul, sternly, "but M. d'Artagnan's sword kills. Not only do I possess his sword, but he has himself taught me how to use it; and with that sword, Monsieur, when a suitable time arrives, I shall avenge his name outraged by you."

"Take care, Monsieur!" exclaimed De Wardes; "if you do not immediately give me satisfaction, I will avail myself of every means to revenge myself."

"Indeed, Monsieur," said Buckingham, suddenly appearing upon the scene of action, "that is a threat which borders on assassination, and would therefore ill become a gentleman."

"What did you say, my Lord?" said De Wardes, turning towards him.

"I said that the words you have just spoken are displeasing to my English ears."

"Very well, Monsieur, if what you say is true," exclaimed De Wardes, thoroughly incensed, "so much the better; I shall at least find in you one man who will not escape me. Understand my words as you like."

"I understand them in the manner they cannot but be understood," answered Buckingham. with that haughty tone which characterized him, and which even in ordinary conversation gave a tone of defiance to everything he said. "M. de Bragelonne is my friend; you insult M. de Bragelonne, and you shall give me satisfaction for that insult."

De Wardes cast a look upon Bragelonne, who, faithful to the character he had assumed, remained calm and unmoved, even after the duke's challenge.

"It would seem that I did not insult M. de Bragelonne, since M. de Bragelonne, who carries a sword by his side, does not consider himself insulted."

"At all events, you insult some one?"

"Yes, I insult M. d'Artagnan," resumed De Wardes, who had observed that this name was the only sting with which he could arouse the anger of Raoul.

"That, then," said Buckingham, "is another matter."

"Precisely so," said De Wardes; "it is the province of M. d'Artagnan's friends to defend him."

"I am entirely of your opinion, Monsieur," replied the Englishman, who had regained all his indifference of manner. "If M. de Bragelonne were offended, I could not reasonably be expected to espouse his quarrel, since he is himself here; but since M. d'Artagnan is in question—"

"You will of course leave me to deal with the matter," said De Wardes.

"Nay, the very contrary, I draw my sword," said Buckingham, unsheathing it as he spoke; "for if M. d'Artagnan injured your father, he rendered, or at least did all that he could to render, a great service to mine."

De Wardes seemed thunderstruck.

"M. d'Artagnan," continued Buckingham, "is the bravest gentleman I know. I shall be delighted, as I

owe him many personal obligations, to settle them with you, by crossing my sword with yours." At the same moment Buckingham drew his sword gracefully, saluted Raoul, and put himself on his guard.

De Wardes advanced a step to meet him.

"Stay, Messieurs!" said Raoul, advancing towards them, and placing his own drawn sword between the combatants; "all this is hardly worth the trouble of blood being shed almost under the eyes of the princess. M. de Wardes speaks ill of M. d'Artagnan, but he is not even acquainted with that gentleman."

"What, Monsieur!" said De Wardes, setting his teeth hard together, and resting the point of his sword on the toe of his boot, "do you assert that I do not know M. d'Artagnan?"

"Certainly not; you do not know him," replied Raoul, coldly, "and you are even not aware where he is to be found."

"Not know where he is?"

"Doubtless, such must be the case, since you fix your quarrel with him upon strangers, instead of seeking M d'Artagnan where he is to be found." De Wardes turned pale. "Well, Monsieur," continued Raoul, "I will tell you where M. d'Artagnan is. He is now in Paris; when on duty, he resides at the Louvre; when not so, in the Rue des Lombards. M. d'Artagnan can be easily found at either of those two places. Having, therefore, as you assert, so many causes of complaint against him, you do not show your courage in not seeking him out, so that he may give you that satisfaction you seem to ask of every one but himself." De Wardes passed his hand across his forehead, which was covered with perspiration. "For shame, M. de Wardes!" continued Raoul, "so quarrelsome a disposition is hardly becoming after the publica-

tion of the edicts against duels. Pray think of that! The king will be incensed at our disobedience, particularly at such a time; and his Majesty will be right."

"Excuses!" murmured De Wardes, "pretexts!"

"Come now," replied Raoul, "that remark of yours is arrant nonsense, my dear M. de Wardes, you know very well that the Duke of Buckingham is a man of undoubted courage, who has already fought ten duels and is ready to fight the eleventh. His name alone is significant enough. So far as I am concerned, you are well aware that I can fight also. I fought at Lens, at Bléneau, at the Dunes in front of the artillery, a hundred paces in front of the line, while you, by the way, were a hundred paces behind it. It is true that on that occasion there was by far too great a crowd of people for your courage to be observed, and on that account, perhaps, you suppressed it; while here it would be a display, and would excite remark. You wish that others should talk of you, — in what manner you do not care. Very well, do not depend upon me, M. de Wardes, to assist you in your designs, for I shall certainly not afford you that pleasure."

"Sensibly observed," said Buckingham, putting up his sword; "and I ask your forgiveness, M. de Bragelonne, for having allowed myself to yield to a first impulse."

De Wardes, however, on the contrary, perfectly furious, bounded forward, and raised his sword threateningly against Raoul, who had scarcely time to put himself in a posture of defence.

"Take care, Monsieur," said Bragelonne, tranquilly, "or you will put out one of my eyes."

"You will not fight, then?" cried De Wardes.

"Not at this moment; but this I promise to do, immediately on our arrival at Paris: I will conduct you to

M. d'Artagnan, to whom you shall detail all the causes of complaint you have against him. M. d'Artagnan will solicit the king's permission to measure swords with you. The king will yield his consent, and when you shall have received your sword-thrust in due course, my dear M. de Wardes, you will consider, in a calmer frame of mind, the precepts of the gospel which enjoin forgetfulness of injuries."

"Ah!" exclaimed De Wardes, furious at this imperturbable coolness, "one can clearly see that you are han a bastard, M. de Bragelonne!"

Raoul became as pale as death; his eyes flashed like lightning, and made De Wardes fall back. Buckingham himself was horror-struck, and threw himself between the two adversaries, whom he expected to see precipitate themselves on each other. De Wardes had reserved this insult for the last; he clasped his sword convulsively in his hand, and awaited the encounter. "You are right, Monsieur," said Raoul, mastering his emotion, "I am only acquainted with my father's name; but I know too well that the Comte de la Fère is an upright and honorable man to fear for a single moment that there is, as you seem to say, any stain upon my birth. My ignorance, therefore, of my mother's name is merely a misfortune for me, and not a reproach. You are deficient in loyalty of conduct, Monsieur; you are wanting in courtesy, in reproaching me with a misfortune. No matter; the insult is given, and this time I hold myself insulted. It is quite understood, then, that after you shall have received satisfaction from M. d'Artagnan, you will settle your quarrel with me."

"I admire your prudence, Monsieur," replied De Wardes, with a bitter smile; "a little while ago you promised me a sword-thrust from M. d'Artagnan, and

now you offer me one from yourself, after I shall have received his."

"Do not disturb yourself," replied Raoul, with concentrated anger; "in matters of fence M. d'Artagnan is exceedingly skilful, and I will beg him as a favor to treat you as he did your father, — in other words, not to put an end to your life, but to leave me the pleasure, after your recovery, of killing you outright, for you have a wicked heart, M. de Wardes, and in very truth, too many precautions cannot be taken against you."

"I shall take my precautions against you, Monsieur," said De Wardes; "be assured of it."

"Allow me, Monsieur," said Buckingham, "to translate your remark by a piece of advice I am about to give M. de Bragelonne: M. de Bragelonne, wear a cuirass."

De Wardes clenched his hands. "Ah! I understand," said he, "you two gentlemen intend to wait until you have taken that precaution before you measure your swords against mine."

"Very well, Monsieur," said Raoul, "since you positively will have it so, let us settle the affair now;" and drawing his sword, he advanced towards De Wardes.

"What are you going to do?" asked Buckingham.

"Be easy," said Raoul; "it will not be very long."

De Wardes placed himself on his guard; their swords crossed. De Wardes flew upon Raoul with such impetuosity that at the first clashing of the steel it was evident to Buckingham that Raoul would manage his adversary. Buckingham stepped aside, and watched the struggle. Raoul was as calm as if he were handling a foil instead of a sword; having retreated a step to gain room, he parried three or four fierce thrusts which De Wardes made at him, caught the sword of the latter within his own and sent it flying twenty paces the other side of the

barrier. Then, as De Wardes stood disarmed and astounded at his defeat, Raoul sheathed his sword, seized him by the collar and the waistband, and hurled him also to the other side of the barrier, trembling and mad with rage.

"We shall meet again," growled De Wardes, rising from the ground and picking up his sword.

"*Pardieu!*" said Raoul, "I have done nothing for the last hour but say the same thing." Then, turning towards Buckingham, he said, "Not a word about this affair, Duke, I entreat you; I am ashamed to have gone so far, but my anger carried me away, and I ask your forgiveness for it, — forget it."

"Dear viscount," said the duke, pressing within his own the vigorous and valiant hand of his companion, "allow me, on the contrary, to remember it, and to look after your safety; that man is dangerous, — he will kill you."

"My father," replied Raoul, "lived for twenty years under the menace of a much more formidable enemy, and he still lives."

"Your father had good friends, Viscount."

"Yes," sighed Raoul, "such friends, indeed, that none are now left like them."

"Do not say that, I beg, at the very moment when I offer you my friendship;" and Buckingham opened his arms to embrace Raoul, who delightedly received the proffered alliance. "In my family," added Buckingham, "you are aware, M. de Bragelonne, that we die to save those we love."

"I know it well, Duke," replied Raoul.



CHAPTER XVIII.

WHAT THE CHEVALIER DE LORRAINE THOUGHT OF THE PRINCESS.

NOTHING further disturbed the serenity of the journey. Under a pretext which was little remarked, M. de Wardes went forward in advance of the others. He took Manicamp with him, for his equable and dreamy disposition acted as a counterpoise to his own. It is a subject of remark, that quarrelsome and restless characters invariably seek the companionship of gentle, timorous dispositions, as if the former sought, in the contrast, a repose from their own ill-humor, and the latter a protection for their own weakness. Buckingham and Bragelonne, admitting De Guiche into their friendship, sounded, in concert with him, the praises of the princess during the whole of the journey. Bragelonne had, however, insisted that their three voices should be in concert, instead of singing in solo parts, as De Guiche and his rival seemed to have acquired a dangerous habit of doing. This style of harmony pleased the queen-mother exceedingly; but it was not perhaps so agreeable to the young princess, who was an incarnation of coquetry, and who without fear for herself sought occasions of peril. She possessed one of those fearless and incautious dispositions which find gratification in an excess of susceptibility, and for whom, also, danger has a certain fascination. And so her glances, her smiles, her toilets — an inexhaustible armory of weapons of offence — were showered down upon the

three young men with overwhelming force; and from her well-stored arsenal issued glances, compliments, and a thousand other charming little attentions which were intended to strike at long range the gentlemen who formed the escort, the townspeople, the officers of the different cities through which she passed, pages, populace, and servants: it was wholesale slaughter, a universal devastation.

By the time the princess arrived at Paris, she had reduced to slavery about a hundred thousand lovers, and brought in her train to Paris half-a-dozen men who were almost mad about her, and two who were quite out of their minds. Raoul was the only person who divined the power of this woman's attraction; and as his heart was already engaged, and thus proof against her arrows, he arrived at the capital cool and distrustful. Occasionally during the journey he conversed with the Queen of England respecting the power of fascination which the princess exercised; and the mother, whom so many misfortunes and deceptions had taught experience, replied: "Henrietta was sure to be illustrious in one way or another, whether born in a palace or in obscurity; for she is a woman of great imagination, capricious, and self-willed."

De Wardes and Manicamp, in their character of heralds, had announced the princess's arrival.

The procession was met at Nanterre by a brilliant escort of cavaliers and carriages. It was Monsieur himself, who, followed by the Chevalier de Lorraine and by his favorites, the latter being themselves followed by a portion of the king's military household, had come to meet his affianced bride. At St. Germain the princess and her mother had changed their heavy travelling-carriage, somewhat impaired by the journey, for a rich and

elegant chariot drawn by six horses with white and gold harness. Seated in this open carriage, as though upon a throne, and beneath a canopy of embroidered silk fringed with waving plumes, appeared the young and lovely princess, on whose beaming face were reflected the softened rose-tints which suited her pearly skin to perfection. Monsieur, on reaching the carriage, was struck by her beauty; he signified his admiration in so marked a manner that the Chevalier de Lorraine shrugged his shoulders among the group of courtiers, while Buckingham and the Comte de Guiche were almost heart-broken. After the usual courtesies had been rendered, and the ceremony completed, the whole procession slowly resumed the road to Paris. The presentations had been carelessly made, and Buckingham, with the rest of the English gentlemen, had been introduced to Monsieur, from whom they had received but a very indifferent attention. But during their progress, as he observed that the duke devoted himself with his accustomed ardor to the carriage door, he asked the Chevalier de Lorraine, his inseparable companion, "Who is that cavalier?"

"He was presented to your Highness a short time since; it is the handsome Duke of Buckingham."

"Yes, yes, I remember."

"The princess's knight," added the favorite, with an inflection of the voice which envious minds can alone give to the simplest phrases.

"What do you say?" replied the prince, who was still on horseback.

"I said, 'the princess's knight.'"

"Has she a recognized knight, then?"

"One would think you might judge of that for yourself; see how they are laughing and flirting, both of them."

"All three of them."

"What do you mean by all three?"

"Do you not see that De Guiche is one of the party?"

"Yes, I see. But what does that prove? — that the princess has two admirers instead of one."

"You poison everything, viper!"

"I poison nothing. Ah! your royal Highness's mind is very perverted. The honors of the kingdom of France are being paid to your wife, and you are not satisfied."

The Duke of Orleans dreaded the satirical humor of the chevalier whenever he found it reached a certain degree of bitterness, and he changed the conversation abruptly. "The princess is pretty," said he, negligently, as if he were speaking of a stranger

"Yes," replied the chevalier, in the same tone.

"You say 'yes' like a 'no.' She has very beautiful black eyes, I think."

"Yes, but small."

"True, but they are brilliant. She has a good figure."

"Her figure is a little spoiled, Monseigneur."

"I do not deny it. She has a noble appearance."

"Yes, but her face is thin."

"I thought her teeth beautiful."

"They can easily be seen, for her mouth is large enough. Decidedly I was wrong, my Lord; you are certainly handsomer than your wife."

"But do you think me as handsome as Buckingham?"

"Certainly, and he thinks so too; for, look, my Lord, he is redoubling his attentions to the princess, to prevent your effacing the impression he has made."

Monsieur made a movement of impatience; but as he noticed a smile of triumph pass over the chevalier's lips, he drew up his horse to a foot-pace. "Why," said he, "should I occupy myself any longer about my cousin?

Do I not already know her? Were we not brought up together? Did I not see her at the Louvre when she was quite a child?"

"A great change has taken place in her since then, Prince,' said the chevalier; "at the period you allude to, she was somewhat less brilliant, and somewhat less proud too. One evening, particularly, you may remember, my Lord, the king refused to dance with her, because he thought her plain and badly dressed!"

These words made the Duke of Orleans frown. It was by no means flattering for him to marry a princess of whom, when young, the king had not thought much. He might probably have replied, but at this moment De Guiche quitted the carriage to join the prince. From a distance he had seen the prince and the chevalier, and full of anxious attention he seemed to be trying to guess the nature of the remarks which they had just exchanged.

Whether from treachery or from imprudence, the chevalier did not take the trouble to dissimulate. "Count," said he, "you 're a man of excellent taste."

"Thank you for the compliment," replied De Guiche; "but why do you say that?"

"Well, I appeal to his Highness!"

"No doubt of it," said Monsieur; "and Guiche knows perfectly well that I regard him as a most finished cavalier."

"Well, that question settled, Count, I resume. You have been in the princess's society, Count, for the last week, have you not?"

"Yes," replied De Guiche, coloring in spite of himself.

"Well, then, tell us frankly, what do you think of her personal appearance?"

"Of her personal appearance?" returned De Guiche, amazed.

"Yes; of her appearance, of her mind, — of herself, in fact."

Astounded by this question, De Guiche hesitated in answering.

"Come, come, De Guiche," resumed the chevalier, laughingly, "tell us your opinion frankly; the prince commands it."

"Yes, yes," said the prince, "be frank."

De Guiche stammered out a few unintelligible words.

"I am perfectly well aware," returned Monsieur, "that the subject is a delicate one, but you know you can tell me everything. What do you think of her?"

In order to avoid betraying his real thoughts, De Guiche had recourse to the only defence which a man taken by surprise really has, and accordingly told an untruth. "I do not think the princess," he said, "either good or bad looking, yet rather good than bad looking."

"What! my dear count," exclaimed the chevalier, "you, who went into such ecstasies and uttered so many exclamations at the sight of her portrait!"

De Guiche colored violently Very fortunately his horse, which was slightly restive, enabled him by a sudden plunge to conceal his agitation. "What portrait?" he murmured, joining them again.

The chevalier had not taken his eyes off him. "Yes, the portrait. Was not the miniature a good likeness?"

"I do not remember. I have forgotten the portrait; it has quite escaped my recollection."

"And yet it made a very marked impression upon you," said the chevalier.

"That is not unlikely."

"Is she clever, at all events?" inquired the duke.

"I believe so, my Lord."

"Is M. de Buckingham so too?" said the chevalier.

"I do not know."

"My own opinion is that he must be," replied the chevalier, "for he makes the princess laugh, and she seems to take no little pleasure in his society, — which never is the case with a clever woman when in the company of a simpleton."

"Of course, then, he must be clever," said De Guiche, simply.

At this moment Raoul opportunely arrived, seeing how De Guiche was pressed by his dangerous questioner, to whom he addressed a remark, and so changed the conversation.

The entrance into the city was brilliant and joyous. The king, in honor of his brother, had directed that the festivities should be on a scale of the greatest magnificence. The princess and her mother alighted at the Louvre, where during their exile they had so gloomily submitted to obscurity, misery, and privations of every description. That palace, which had been so inhospitable a residence for the unhappy daughter of Henry IV., with its naked walls, its sunken floorings, its ceilings covered with cobwebs, the vast but broken marble chimney-places, its cold hearths on which the charity extended to them by parliament had hardly permitted a fire to glow, was completely altered in appearance. It now contained the richest hangings and the thickest carpets, glistening flagstones and new pictures, with their richly gilded frames; everywhere could be seen candelabras, mirrors, and furniture and fittings of the most sumptuous character; everywhere also were guards of the proudest military bearing with floating plumes, crowds of attendants and courtiers in the antechambers

and upon the staircases. In the courtyards, where the grass but lately grew, — as if the ungrateful Mazarin had thought it a good idea to let the Parisians perceive that solitude and disorder were, with misery and despair, the proper accompaniments of a fallen monarchy, — in these immense courtyards, formerly silent and desolate, paraded cavaliers whose prancing horses drew sparks from the glistening flagstones. Carriages were filled with young and beautiful women, who awaited the opportunity of saluting, as she passed, the daughter of that daughter of France who during her widowhood and her exile had sometimes gone without wood for her fire or bread for her table, and whom the meanest attendants of the palace had treated with indifference and contempt.

And so Madame Henrietta returned to the Louvre, her heart swollen with grief and bitter recollections, while her daughter, whose disposition was fickle and forgetful, returned to it with triumph and delight Madame Henrietta knew but too well that the present brilliant reception was paid to the happy mother of a king restored to his throne, and that throne second to none in Europe; while the poor reception she had before received was paid to her, the daughter of Henry IV., as a punishment for having been unfortunate.

After the princesses had been installed in their apartments and had rested themselves, the gentlemen who had formed their escort, having in like manner recovered from their fatigue, resumed their accustomed habits and occupations.

Bragelonne began by setting off to see his father; but he had left for Blois. He then tried to see M. d'Artagnan; but he, being engaged in the organization of a new military household for the king, could not be found anywhere. Bragelonne next fell back upon De Guiche;

but the count was occupied in a long conference with his tailors and with Manicamp, which consumed his whole time. With the Duke of Buckingham he fared still worse, for the duke was purchasing horses after horses, diamonds upon diamonds; he monopolized every embroiderer, jeweller, and tailor that Paris could boast of. Between De Guiche and Buckingham a vigorous contest ensued, more or less courteous, in which, in order to insure success, the duke was ready to spend a million; while the Maréchal de Grammont had only allowed his son sixty thousand livres. So Buckingham laughed and spent his million. De Guiche groaned in despair, and would have torn his hair had it not been for the advice Bragelonne gave him.

"A million!" repeated De Guiche, daily, "I must submit. Why will not the marshal advance me a portion of my patrimony?"

"Because you will throw it away," said Raoul.

"What can that matter to him? If I am to die of it, I shall die of it, and then I shall need nothing further."

"But what need is there to die?" said Raoul.

"I do not wish to be surpassed in elegance by an Englishman."

"My dear count," said Manicamp, "elegance is not a costly commodity, it is only a very difficult one."

"Yes, but difficult things cost a good deal of money, and I have only sixty thousand livres."

"A very embarrassing state of things, truly!" said De Wardes. "Spend as much as Buckingham; there is only a difference of nine hundred and forty thousand livres."

"Where am I to find them?"

"Get into debt."

"I am so already."

"A greater reason for getting further."

Advice like this resulted in De Guiche becoming excited to such an extent that he committed extravagances where Buckingham only incurred expenses. The rumor of this prodigality delighted the hearts of all the shopkeepers in Paris; from the hotel of the Duke of Buckingham to that of Grammont nothing but wonders was dreamed of.

While all this was going on, the princess was resting herself, and Bragelonne was engaged in writing to Mademoiselle de la Vallière. He had already despatched four letters, and not an answer to any one of them had been received, when, on the very morning fixed for the marriage ceremony, which was to take place in the chapel at the Palais-Royal, Raoul, who was dressing, heard his valet announce M. de Malicorne. "What can this Malicorne want with me?" thought Raoul; and then said to his valet, "Let him wait."

"It is a gentleman from Blois," said the valet.

"Admit him at once," said Raoul, eagerly.

Malicorne entered, brilliant as a star, and wearing a superb sword by his side. After having saluted Raoul most gracefully, he said: "M. de Bragelonne, I am the bearer of a thousand compliments from a lady to you."

Raoul colored. "From a lady," said he, — "from a lady of Blois?"

"Yes, Monsieur; from Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"Thank you, Monsieur; I recollect you now," said Raoul. "And what does Mademoiselle de Montalais desire of me?"

Malicorne drew four letters from his pocket which he offered to Raoul.

"My own letters! is it possible?" he said, turning pale; "my letters, and the seals unbroken!"

"Monsieur, your letters did not find, at Blois, the per-

son to whom they were addressed, and so they are now returned to you."

"Mademoiselle de la Vallière has left Blois, then?" exclaimed Raoul.

"A week ago."

"Where is she, then?"

"She must be at Paris, Monsieur."

"But how was it known that these letters came from me?"

"Mademoiselle de Montalais recognized your handwriting and your seal," said Malicorne.

Raoul colored and smiled. "Mademoiselle de Montalais is exceedingly good," he said; "she is always kind and charming."

"Always, Monsieur."

"Surely she could give me some precise information about Mademoiselle de la Vallière. I could never find her in this immense city.

Malicorne drew another packet from his pocket. "You may possibly find in this letter what you are anxious to learn."

Raoul hurriedly broke the seal. The writing was that of Mademoiselle Aure, and the letter contained these words: —

PARIS, PALAIS-ROYAL.

The day of the nuptial benediction.

"What does this mean?" inquired Raoul of Malicorne; "you probably know, Monsieur."

"I do, Monsieur the Viscount."

"For pity's sake, tell me, then."

"Impossible, Monsieur."

"Why so?"

"Because Mademoiselle Aure has forbidden me to do so."

Raoul looked at his strange companion, and remained silent. "At least," he resumed, "tell me whether it is advantageous to me or not."

"That you will see."

"You are very strict in your reservations."

"Will you grant me a favor, Monsieur?" said Malicorne

"In exchange for that which you refuse me?"

"Precisely."

"What is it?"

"I have the greatest desire to see the ceremony, and I have no ticket to admit me, in spite of all the steps I have taken to secure one Could you get me admitted?"

"Certainly."

"Do me this kindness, then, I entreat, Monsieur the Viscount."

"Most willingly, Monsieur, come with me."

"I am exceedingly indebted to you, Monsieur," said Malicorne.

"I thought you were a friend of M. de Manicamp."

"I am, Monsieur, but this morning I was with him as he was dressing, and I let a bottle of blacking fall over his new dress, and he flew at me with his sword in his hand, so that I was obliged to make my escape. That is the reason I could not ask him for a ticket; he would have killed me."

"I can believe it," said Raoul "I know Manicamp is capable of killing a man who has been unfortunate enough to commit the crime you have to reproach yourself with, but I will repair the mischief as far as you are concerned. I will but fasten my cloak, and shall then be ready to serve you, not only as a guide, but as an introducer also.'

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SURPRISE OF MADEMOISELLE DE MONTALAIS.

THE princess was married in the Chapel of the Palais-Royal, in the presence of a crowd of courtiers, who had been most scrupulously selected. However, notwithstanding the marked favor which an invitation indicated, Raoul, faithful to his promise to Malicorne, who was so anxious to witness the ceremony, obtained admission for him. After he had fulfilled this engagement, Raoul approached De Guiche, who, as if in contrast with his magnificent costume, exhibited a countenance so utterly cast down by grief that the Duke of Buckingham was the only one present who could contend with him in pallor and dejection.

"Take care, Count!" said Raoul, approaching his friend, and preparing to support him at the moment when the archbishop blessed the married couple. In fact, the Prince of Condé was seen attentively scrutinizing these two images of desolation, standing like caryatides at either side of the nave of the church. The count, therefore, kept a more careful watch over himself.

At the termination of the ceremony, the king and queen passed onward to the grand reception-room, where Madame and her suite were to be presented to them. It was remarked that the king, who had seemed more than surprised at his sister-in-law's appearance, was most flattering in his compliments to her. Again, it was remarked that the queen-mother, fixing a long and thoughtful gaze upon

Buckingham, leaned towards Madame de Motteville as though to ask her, "Do you not see how much he resembles his father?" and finally it was remarked that Monsieur watched everybody, and seemed very discontented. After the reception of the princes and ambassadors, Monsieur solicited the king's permission to present to him, as well as to Madame, the persons belonging to their new household.

"Are you aware, Viscount," inquired the Prince de Condé of Raoul, "whether the household has been selected by a person of taste, and whether there are any faces worth looking at?"

"I have not the slightest idea, Monseigneur," replied Raoul.

"You affect ignorance, surely."

"In what way, Monseigneur?"

"You are a friend of De Guiche, who is one of the friends of the prince."

"That may be so, Monseigneur; but the matter having no interest whatever for me, I never questioned De Guiche on the subject; and De Guiche on his part, never having been questioned, has not communicated any particulars to me."

"But Manicamp?"

"It is true I saw M. de Manicamp at Havre, and during the journey here, but I was very careful to be as little inquisitive towards him as I had been towards De Guiche; besides, is it likely that M. de Manicamp should know anything of such matters? He is a person of only secondary importance."

"Eh, my dear viscount, do you not know better than that?" said the prince. "Why, it is these persons of secondary importance who on such occasions have all the influence; and the proof is that nearly everything

has been done through Manicamp's presentations to De Guiche and through De Guiche to Monsieur."

"Well, Monseigneur, I was completely ignorant of that," said Raoul; "and what your Highness does me the honor to impart is perfectly new to me."

"I will most readily believe you, although it seems incredible; besides, we shall not have long to wait. See, the flying squadron is advancing, as good Queen Catherine used to say. Ah! what pretty faces!"

A bevy of young girls at this moment entered the room, conducted by Madame de Navailles, and to Manicamp's credit, be it said, if indeed he had taken that part in their selection which the Prince de Condé had alleged, it was a display calculated to dazzle those who, like the prince, could appreciate every character and style of beauty. A young fair-complexioned girl, who might be twenty or twenty-one years of age, and whose large blue eyes flashed, as she opened them, in the most dazzling manner, walked at the head of the band, and was the first presented.

"Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente," said Madame de Navailles to Monsieur, who, as he bowed to his wife, repeated, "Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente."

"Ah," said the prince, turning to Raoul, "she seems tolerable enough."

"Yes," said Raoul; "she is pretty, but has a somewhat haughty style."

"Bah! we know these airs very well, Viscount; three months hence she will be tame enough. But look,—there indeed is a beauty!"

"Yes," said Raoul, "and one I am acquainted with."

"Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais," said Madame de Navailles. Monsieur repeated the full name carefully.

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Raoul, fixing his bewildered gaze upon the entrance doorway.

"What's the matter?" inquired the prince; "was it Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais who made you utter such a 'Great heavens'?"

"No, Monseigneur, no," replied Raoul, pale and trembling.

"Well, then, if it be not Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais, it is that charming blonde who follows her. What beautiful eyes! She is rather thin, but has fascinations without number."

"Mademoiselle de la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière!" said Madame de Navailles; and as this name resounded through Raoul's whole being, a cloud seemed to rise from his heart to his eyes, so that he neither saw nor heard anything more. The prince, finding that Raoul remained silent under his railleries, moved forward to inspect somewhat closer the beautiful girls whom his first glance had already particularized.

"Louise here! Louise a maid of honor to Madame!" murmured Raoul, and his eyes, which did not suffice to satisfy his reason, wandered from Louise to Montalais. The latter had already emancipated herself from her assumed timidity, which she only needed for the presentation and for her reverences.

Mademoiselle de Montalais, from the corner of the room to which she had retired, was looking with no slight degree of assurance at the different persons present; and having discovered Raoul, she amused herself with the profound astonishment into which her own and her friend's presence there had thrown the poor lover. Her merry and mischievous look, which Raoul tried to avoid meeting, and yet which he sought inquiringly from time to time, placed Raoul on the rack. As for Louise, whether from natural timidity, or from some other reason for which Raoul could not account, she kept her eyes

constantly cast down, and intimidated, dazzled, and with heaving breast, she withdrew herself as much as possible, unaffected even by the hints which Montalais gave her with her elbow.

The whole scene was a perfect enigma to Raoul, the key to which the poor viscount would have given anything to obtain. But no one was there who could assist him, — not even Malicorne, who, a little uneasy at finding himself in the presence of so many persons of gentle birth, and not a little discouraged by Montalais's bantering glances, had described a circle, and by degrees had succeeded in getting a few paces from the prince, behind the group of maids of honor, and nearly within reach of Mademoiselle Aure's voice, she being the planet around which he, her humble satellite, seemed compelled to gravitate.

As he recovered his self-possession, Raoul fancied he recognized voices on his left which were familiar to him, and he perceived De Wardes, De Guiche, and the Chevalier de Lorraine conversing together. It is true that they were talking in tones so low that the sound of their words could hardly be heard in the vast apartment. To speak in that manner from any particular place without bending down, or turning round, or looking at the person with whom one is engaged in conversation, is a talent which cannot be immediately acquired in perfection by new-comers. A long study is needed for such conversations, which, without a look, gesture, or movement of the head, seemed like the conversation of a group of statues.

In fact, in the king's and the queen's grand assemblies, while their Majesties were speaking, and while every one present seemed to be listening with the most profound silence, some of these noiseless conversations took place, in which adulation was not the prevailing feature. But Raoul was one among others exceedingly clever in this

art, so much a matter of etiquette, so that from the movement of the lips he was often able to guess the sense of the words.

"Who is that Montalais?" inquired De Wardes, "and that La Vallière? What country-town have we had sent here?"

"Montalais?" said the Chevalier de Lorraine, "oh, I know her; she is a good sort of girl, whom we shall find amusing enough. La Vallière is a charming girl, slightly lame."

"Humph!" said De Wardes.

"Do not be absurd, De Wardes! There are some very characteristic and ingenious Latin axioms upon lame ladies."

"Messieurs, Messieurs," said De Guiche, looking at Raoul with uneasiness, "be a little careful, I entreat you."

But the uneasiness of the count, in appearance at least, was not needed. Raoul had preserved the firmest and most indifferent countenance, although he had not lost a word that had passed. He seemed to keep an account of the insolence and license of the two speakers, in order to settle matters with them at his earliest opportunity.

De Wardes seemed to guess what was passing in his mind, and continued, "Who are these young ladies' lovers?"

"Montalais's lover?" said the chevalier.

"Yes, Montalais first."

"Well, you, I, or De Guiche, — whoever likes, in fact."

"And the other?"

"Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"

"Yes."

"Take care, Messieurs," exclaimed De Guiche, anxious

to put a stop to De Wardes's reply, "take care! Madame is listening to us."

Raoul thrust his hand up to the wrist into his doublet, and left the mark of his nails on his flesh. But the very malignity which he saw was excited against these poor girls made him take a serious resolution. "Poor Louise," he said to himself, "has come here only with an honorable object in view and under honorable protection; but I must learn what that object is, and who it is that protects her," and imitating Malicorne's manœuvre, he made his way towards the group of the maids of honor. The presentations soon terminated. The king, who had done nothing but look at and admire Madame, shortly afterwards left the reception-room, accompanied by the two queens. The Chevalier de Lorraine resumed his place beside Monsieur, and, as he accompanied him, insinuated a few drops of the poison which he had collected during the last hour, while looking at some of the new faces in the court, and suspecting that some hearts might be happy. A few of the persons present followed the king as he went out; but such of the courtiers as assumed an independence of character and professed a gallantry of disposition, began to approach the ladies. The prince paid his compliments to Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente; Buckingham devoted himself to Madame de Chalais and to Madame de Lafayette, whom Madame had already distinguished by her notice and whom she held in high regard. As for the Comte de Guiche, who had abandoned Monsieur as soon as he could approach Madame alone, he conversed, with great animation, with Madame de Valentinois and with Mesdemoiselles de Créquy and de Châtillon.

Amid these varied political and amorous interests, Malicorne was anxious to gain Montalais's attention;

but the latter preferred talking with Raoul, even if it were only to enjoy his numerous questions and his surprise. Raoul had gone straight to Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and had saluted her with the profoundest respect, at which Louise blushed and could not say a word. Montalais, however, hurried to her assistance.

"Well, Monsieur the Viscount, here we are, you see."

"I do indeed see you," said Raoul, smiling; "and it is exactly because you are here, that I wish to ask for some explanation."

Malicorne approached the group with his most fascinating smile.

"Go away, M. Malicorne," said Montalais; "really, you are exceedingly indiscreet." Malicorne bit his lips and retired a few steps, without making any reply. His smile, however, changed its expression, and from its former frankness became mocking in its expression.

"You would like an explanation, M. Raoul?" inquired Montalais.

"The situation calls for one, I think; Mademoiselle de la Vallière a maid of honor to Madame!"

"Why should not she be a maid of honor as well as myself?" inquired Montalais.

"Pray accept my compliments, young ladies," said Raoul, who fancied that he perceived that they were not disposed to answer him in a direct manner.

"Your remark was not made in a very complimentary manner, Monsieur the Viscount."

"Mine?"

"Certainly; I appeal to Louise."

"M. de Bragelonne probably thinks the position is above my condition," said Louise, hesitatingly.

"Oh, no, Mademoiselle," replied Raoul, eagerly; "you know very well that such is not my feeling. Were you

called upon to occupy a queen's throne, I should not be surprised, how much greater reason, then, such a position as this? The only circumstance which amazes me is that I should not have learned it until to-day, and that by mere accident."

"That is true," replied Montalais to Louise, with her usual giddiness; "you know nothing about it, and there is no reason why you should. M. de Bragelonne had written four letters to you, but your mother was the only person who remained behind at Blois, and it was necessary to prevent these letters from falling into her hands. I intercepted them, and returned them to M. Raoul; so that he believed you were still at Blois, while you were here in Paris, and had no idea how high you had risen in rank."

"Did you not inform M. Raoul, as I begged you to do?" exclaimed Louise.

"Why should I? — to give him an opportunity of making some of his severe remarks and moral reflections, and to undo what we had had so much trouble in getting done? Oh, certainly not!"

"Am I so very severe, then?" inquired Raoul.

"Besides," said Montalais, "it is sufficient to say that it suited me. I was about setting off for Paris; you were away. Louise was weeping her eyes out, — interpret that as you please. I begged a friend, a protector of mine, who had obtained the appointment for me, to solicit one for Louise; the appointment arrived. Louise left in order to get her costume prepared; as I had my own ready, I remained behind. I received your letters, and returned them to you, adding a few words, promising you a surprise. Your surprise is before you, Monsieur, and seems to be a fair one enough; you have nothing more to ask. Come, M. Malicorne, it is now time to leave

these young people together; they have many things to talk about. Give me your hand; I trust that you appreciate the honor which is conferred upon you, M. Malicorne."

"Forgive me, Mademoiselle," said Raoul, arresting the giddy girl, and giving to his voice an intonation the gravity of which contrasted with that of Montalais, — "forgive me; but may I inquire the name of the protector you speak of? — for if protection be extended to you, Mademoiselle, for which, indeed, so many reasons exist," added Raoul, bowing, "I do not see that the same reasons exist why Mademoiselle de la Vallière should be similarly protected."

"But, M. Raoul," said Louise, innocently, "the matter is very simple, and I do not see why I should not tell it to you myself. M. Malicorne obtained the appointment for me."

Raoul remained for a moment amazed, asking himself if they were trifling with him. He then turned round to interrogate Malicorne; but he had been hurried away by Montalais, and was already at some distance from them. Mademoiselle de la Vallière attempted to follow her friend; but Raoul, with gentle authority, detained her. "Louise, one word only, I beg."

"But, M. Raoul," said Louise, blushing, "we are alone; every one has left. They will become anxious, and will be looking for us."

"Fear nothing," said the young man, smiling; "we are neither of us of sufficient importance for our absence to be remarked."

"But I have my duty to perform, M. Raoul."

"Do not be alarmed, Mademoiselle! I am acquainted with the usages of the court. You will not be on duty until to-morrow; a few minutes are at your disposal, which

will enable you to give me the explanation I am about to have the honor to ask of you."

"How serious you are, M. Raoul!" said Louise, uneasily.

"Because the circumstance is a serious one. Are you listening?"

"I am listening; I would only repeat, Monsieur, that we are quite alone."

"You are right," said Raoul; and offering her his hand, he led the young girl into the gallery adjoining the reception-room, the windows of which looked out upon the square. Every one hurried towards the middle window, which had a balcony outside, from which all the details of the slow and formal preparations for departure could be seen. Raoul opened one of the side windows, and then, being alone with Louise, said to her: "You know, Louise, that from my childhood I have regarded you as my sister, as one who has been the confidante of all my troubles, to whom I have intrusted all my hopes."

"Yes, M. Raoul," she answered softly; "yes, I know that."

"You used, on your side, to show the same friendship towards me, and had the same confidence in me; why have you not, on this occasion, been my friend, and why have you shown a suspicion of me?" Mademoiselle de la Vallière did not answer. "I had thought you loved me," continued Raoul, whose voice became more and more agitated; "I had thought that you consented to all the plans which we together laid down for our own happiness, at the time when we wandered up and down the large walks of Cour-Cheverny and under the avenue of poplar-trees leading to Blois. You do not answer me, Louise." He stopped. "Is it possible," he inquired, breathing with difficulty, "that you no longer love me?"

"I did not say so," replied Louise, softly.

"Oh, tell me the truth, I implore you! All my hopes in life are centred in you. I chose you for your gentle and simple tastes. Do not suffer yourself to be dazzled, Louise, now that you are in the midst of a court where all that is pure becomes corrupt, where all that is young soon grows old. Louise, close your ears, that you may not hear what may be said; shut your eyes, that you may not see the examples before you; shut your lips, that you may not inhale the corrupting influences about you. Without falsehood or subterfuge, Louise, am I to believe what Mademoiselle de Montalais stated? Louise, did you come to Paris because I was no longer at Blois?"

La Vallière blushed and concealed her face in her hands.

"Yes, it was so, then," exclaimed Raoul, enraptured; "that was your reason for coming here. Oh, I love you as I never yet loved you! Thank you, Louise, for this devotion; but measures must be taken to place you beyond all insult, to secure you from every harm. Louise, a maid of honor in the court of a young princess in these times of freedom of manners and inconstant affections, — a maid of honor is placed as an object of attack without having any means of defence afforded her. This state of things is not seemly for you; you must be married in order to be respected."

"Married?"

"Yes. There is my hand, Louise; will you place your hand within it?"

"But your father?"

"My father leaves me perfectly free."

"Yet —"

"I understand your scruples, Louise; I will consult my father."

"Oh, M. Raoul, reflect, wait!"

"Wait! it is impossible; reflect, Louise, when you are concerned! it would be insulting to you. Give me your hand, dear Louise. I am my own master. My father will consent, I know. Give me your hand, do not keep me waiting thus! One word in answer, one word only; if not, I shall begin to think that in order to change you forever nothing more was needed than a single step in the palace, a single breath of favor, a smile from the queen, a single look from the king."

Raoul had no sooner pronounced this last word than La Vallière became as pale as death, no doubt from her fear at seeing the young man so roused. With a movement as rapid as thought, she placed both her hands in those of Raoul, and then fled without adding a syllable, disappeared without casting a look behind her. Raoul felt his whole frame tremble at the contact of her hand, he received the promise as a solemn assurance wrung by love from the timidity of innocence.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CONSENT OF ATHOS.

Raoul had left the Palais-Royal full of ideas which admitted of no delay in their execution. He mounted his horse in the courtyard, and followed the road to Blois, while the marriage festivities of Monsieur and the princess of England were celebrated with great delight by the courtiers, but to the great despair of De Guiche and Buckingham. Raoul lost no time on the road, and in sixteen hours arrived at Blois. As he travelled along, he marshalled his most convincing arguments. Fever also is an argument that cannot be answered, and Raoul had an attack of fever.

Athos was in his study, making some additions to his memoirs, when Raoul entered, shown in by Grimaud. Keen-sighted and penetrating, a mere glance at his son told him that something extraordinary had befallen him.

"You seem to have come on some matter of great importance," said he to Raoul, after he had embraced him, and pointing to a seat.

"Yes, Monsieur," replied the young man; "and I entreat you to give me the same kind attention which has never yet been refused me."

"Speak, Raoul!"

"I present the case to you, Monsieur, free from all preface, for that would be unworthy of you. Mademoiselle de la Vallière is in Paris as one of Madame's maids of honor. I have pondered deeply on the matter. I love

Mademoiselle de la Vallière above everything; and it is not proper to leave her in a position where her reputation, her virtue even, may be exposed. It is my wish, therefore, to marry her, Monsieur, and I have come to solicit your consent to this marriage."

Athos had maintained, during this communication, absolute silence and reserve. Raoul, who had begun his speech with an assumption of self-possession, finished it by allowing manifest emotion to escape him at every word.

Athos fixed upon Bragelonne a searching look, overshadowed indeed by a slight sadness. "You have considered it well?" he inquired.

"Yes, Monsieur."

"I believe you have already been made acquainted with my views respecting this alliance?"

"Yes, Monsieur," replied Raoul, in a low tone of voice; "but you added that if I insisted —"

"You do insist, then?"

Bragelonne stammered out an almost unintelligible assent.

"Your passion," continued Athos, tranquilly, "must indeed be very great, since, notwithstanding my dislike to this union, you persist in desiring it."

Raoul passed his trembling hand across his forehead to remove the perspiration which had collected there.

Athos looked at him, and his heart was touched with pity for him. He then rose, and said: "It is no matter; my own personal feelings are of no consequence, since yours are concerned. You need my assistance; I am ready to give it. Tell me what you want."

"Your kind indulgence, first of all, Monsieur," said Raoul, taking hold of his hand.

"You have mistaken my feelings, Raoul; I have more

than mere indulgence for you in my heart," replied the count.

Raoul kissed, as devotedly as a lover could have done, the hand he held in his own.

"Come, come," said Athos, "I am quite ready, Raoul; what do you wish me to sign?"

"Oh, nothing, Monsieur, nothing! Only it would be very kind if you would take the trouble to write to the king, to whom I belong, and solicit his Majesty's permission for me to marry Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"Well thought, Raoul! After or rather before myself, you have a master to consult, that master being the king; it is loyal in you to submit yourself voluntarily to this double ordeal. I will grant your request without delay, Raoul."

The count approached the window, and leaning out called to Grimaud, who showed his head from an arbor covered with jasmine, which he was occupied in trimming.

"My horses, Grimaud!" continued the count.

"Why this order, Monsieur?" inquired Raoul.

"We shall start in two hours."

"Whither?"

"For Paris."

"Paris, Monsieur! you go to Paris?"

"Is not the king at Paris?"

"Certainly."

"Well, ought we not to go there? Have you forgotten yourself?"

"Yet, Monsieur," said Raoul, almost alarmed by this kind condescension, "I do not ask you to put yourself to such inconvenience; and a letter merely —"

"You mistake my position, Raoul. It is not respectful that a simple gentleman such as I am should write to

his sovereign. I wish to speak, and I ought to speak, to his Majesty, and I will do so. We will go together, Raoul."

"You overpower me with your kindness, Monsieur."

"How do you think his Majesty is affected?"

"Towards me, Monsieur?"

"Yes."

"Excellently well disposed."

"Has he told you so?"

"With his own lips"

"On what occasion?"

"Upon the recommendation of M. d'Artagnan, I believe, and on account of an affair in the Place de Grève, when I had the honor to draw my sword in the king's service. I have reason to believe, then, that, vanity apart, I stand well with his Majesty."

"So much the better."

"But I entreat you, Monsieur," pursued Raoul, "not to maintain towards me this grave and serious manner. Do not make me regret having listened to a feeling stronger than anything else."

"That is the second time you have said so, Raoul; it was quite unnecessary. You require my formal consent, and you have it. We need talk no more on the subject, therefore. Come and see my new plantations, Raoul."

The young man knew very well that after the expression of his father's wish, no opportunity of discussion was left him. He bowed his head, and followed his father into the garden. Athos leisurely pointed out to him the grafts, the cuttings, and the avenues he was planting. This perfect repose of manner disconcerted Raoul more and more; the love with which his own heart was filled seemed so great that the whole world could hardly contain it. How, then, could his father's heart remain void,

and closed to its influence? Bragelonne thereupon, collecting all his courage, suddenly exclaimed: "It is impossible, Monsieur, that you can have any reason to reject Mademoiselle de la Vallière, she is so good, so sweet, so pure, that your mind, so perfect in its penetration, ought to appreciate her worth. In Heaven's name, does any secret enmity or hereditary dislike exist between you and her family?"

"Look, Raoul, at that beautiful lily-of-the-valley," said Athos; "observe how the shade and the damp situation suit it, particularly the shadow which that sycamore-tree casts over it, so that the warmth, and not the blazing heat of the sun, filters through its drooping leaves."

Raoul stopped, bit his lips, and then, with the blood mantling in his face, said courageously: "One word of explanation, I beg, Monsieur. You cannot forget that your son is a man."

"In that case," replied Athos, drawing himself up with sternness, "prove to me that you are a man, for you do not show yourself to be a son. I begged you to wait the opportunity of forming an illustrious alliance. I should have obtained a wife for you from the first ranks of the rich nobility. I wished you to be distinguished by the splendor which glory and fortune confer, for nobility of descent you have already."

"Monsieur," exclaimed Raoul, carried away by a first impulse, "I was reproached the other day for not knowing who my mother was."

Athos turned pale; then knitting his brows like the greatest of the heathen deities, "I am waiting to learn the reply you made, Monsieur," he demanded, in an imperious manner.

"Forgive me! oh, forgive me!" murmured the young man, sinking at once from the lofty tone he had assumed.

"What was your reply, Monsieur?" demanded the count, stamping his foot upon the ground.

"Monsieur, my sword was in my hand immediately; he who insulted me placed himself on guard; I struck his sword over a palisade, and threw him after it."

"And why did n't you kill him?"

"The king forbids duelling, Monsieur, and at that moment I was an ambassador of the king"

"Very well," said Athos; "but this furnishes a greater reason why I should see his Majesty."

"What do you intend to ask him, Monsieur?"

"For authority to draw my sword against the man who has inflicted this injury upon me."

"Monsieur, if I did not act as I ought to have done, I beg you to forgive me."

"Did I reproach you, Raoul?"

"Still, the permission you are going to ask from the king?"

"I will implore his Majesty to sign your marriage-contract, but on one condition."

"Are conditions necessary with me, Monsieur? Command, and you shall be obeyed."

"On one condition," continued Athos: "that you tell me the name of the man who has spoken thus of — your mother."

"But, Monsieur, what need is there that you should know his name? The offence was directed against myself; and, the permission once obtained from his Majesty, to revenge it is my affair."

"His name, Monsieur?"

"I will not allow you to expose yourself."

"Do you take me for a Don Diego? His name, I say!"

"You insist upon it?"

"I demand it."

"The Vicomte de Wardes."

"Very well," said Athos, tranquilly; "I know him. But our horses are ready, I see; and instead of delaying our departure for a couple of hours, we will set off at once. Come, Monsieur!"

CHAPTER XXI.

MONSIEUR BECOMES JEALOUS OF THE DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM.

WHILE the Comte de la Fère was proceeding on his way to Paris, accompanied by Raoul, the Palais-Royal was the theatre of a scene which Molière would have called excellent comedy. Four days had elapsed since Monsieur's marriage. Having breakfasted very hurriedly, he passed into his antechamber, frowning and out of temper. The repast had not been over agreeable. Madame had had breakfast served in her own apartment, and Monsieur had breakfasted almost alone; the Chevalier de Lorraine and Manicamp were the only other persons present at the meal, which had lasted three quarters of an hour without a single syllable having been uttered. Manicamp, who was less intimate with his royal Highness than the Chevalier de Lorraine, vainly endeavored to detect, from the expression of the prince's face, what had made him so ill-humored. The Chevalier de Lorraine, who had no occasion to speculate about anything, inasmuch as he knew all, ate his breakfast with that extraordinary appetite which the troubles of others afforded him, and enjoyed at the same time both the ill-humor of Monsieur and the perplexity of Manicamp. He seemed delighted, while he went on eating, to detain at table the prince, who was very impatient to move. Monsieur at times repented the ascendency which he had permitted the Chevalier de Lorraine to acquire over him, and which exempted the latter from any observance of etiquette towards him. Monsieur was now in one of those moods; but he dreaded

as much as he liked the chevalier, and contented himself with raging inwardly. Every now and then Monsieur raised his eyes to the ceiling, then lowered them towards the slices of *pâté* which the chevalier was attacking; and finally, not venturing to betray his anger, he began a pantomime which Harlequin might have admired. At last, however, Monsieur could control himself no longer, and at the dessert, rising from the table in excessive wrath, as we have related, he left the Chevalier de Lorraine to finish his breakfast as he pleased. Seeing Monsieur rise from the table, Manicamp rose quickly, napkin in hand. Monsieur ran, rather than walked, towards the antechamber, and finding an usher there, gave him some directions in a low voice. Then, turning back again, but avoiding the breakfast-room, he passed through several rooms, with the intention of seeking the queen-mother in her oratory, where she usually remained.

It was about ten o'clock in the morning. Anne of Austria was engaged in writing as Monsieur entered. The queen-mother was extremely attached to her son, for he was handsome in person and amiable in disposition. He was in fact more affectionate, and, so to speak, more effeminate than the king. He pleased his mother by those trifling sympathetic attentions which all women like to receive. Anne of Austria, who would have rejoiced to have had a daughter, found in this her favorite son the attentions, solicitude, and caressing manners of a child of twelve. All the time he passed with his mother he employed in admiring her beautiful arms, in giving his opinion upon her cosmetics and receipts for compounding essences, in which she was very particular; and then, too, he kissed her hands and eyes in the most endearing and childlike manner, and had always some sweetmeats to offer her, or some new style of dress to recommend.

Anne of Austria loved the king, or rather the regal power in her eldest son: Louis XIV. represented legitimacy by divine right. With the king her character was that of the queen-mother; with Philip she was simply the mother. The latter knew that of all places of refuge a mother's heart is the most compassionate and the surest. When quite a child, he had always fled there for refuge when storms arose between him and his brother; often, after having struck him, which constituted the crime of high treason on his part, after certain engagements with hands and nails in which the king and his rebellious subject indulged in their night-dresses upon a disputed bed, having their servant Laporte as umpire, — Philip, the conqueror, but terrified at his victory, used to flee to his mother to obtain reinforcements from her, or at least the assurance of a forgiveness, which Louis XIV. granted with difficulty and after an interval. Anne, from this habit of peaceful intervention, had succeeded in arranging the differences between her sons, and in sharing at the same time all their secrets. The king, somewhat jealous of that maternal solicitude which was bestowed particularly upon his brother, felt disposed to show towards his mother more submission and attachment than his character really possessed.

Anne of Austria had adopted this line of conduct especially towards the young queen. In this manner she ruled with almost despotic sway over the royal household; and she was already preparing all her batteries to rule with the same absolute authority over the household of her second son. Anne experienced almost a feeling of pride whenever she saw any one enter her apartments with woe-begone looks, pale cheeks, or red eyes, comprehending that assistance was required either by the weakest or by the most rebellious. She was

writing, we have said, when Monsieur entered her oratory, not with red eyes or pale cheeks, but restless, out of temper, and annoyed. With an absent air he kissed his mother's arms, and sat down before receiving her permission to do so. Considering the strict rules of etiquette established at the court of Anne of Austria, this forgetfulness of customary respect was a sign of preoccupation, especially on Philip's part, who of his own accord observed towards her a respect of a somewhat exaggerated character. If, therefore, he so notoriously failed with regard to such principles of respect, there must surely be a serious cause for it.

"What is the matter, Philip?" inquired Anne of Austria, turning towards her son.

"A great many things," murmured the prince, dolefully.

"You look like a man who has a great deal to do," said the queen, laying down her pen. Philip frowned, but did not reply. "Among the various subjects which occupy your mind," said Anne of Austria, "there must surely be one which occupies it more than others."

"Yes, Madame; one indeed has occupied me more than any other."

"Well, what is it? I am listening."

Philip opened his mouth as if to give vent to all the troubles which were passing in his mind, and which seemed only waiting for a point of issue to burst forth. But he suddenly became silent, and a sigh alone expressed all that his heart contained.

"Come, Philip, show a little firmness," said the queen-mother. "When one has to complain of anything, it is generally an individual who is the cause of it. Am I not right?"

"I do not say no, Madame."

"Whom do you wish to speak about? Come, take courage!"

"In fact, Madame, what I may have to say must be kept a perfect secret; for when a lady is in the case —"

"Ah! you wish to speak of Madame, then?" inquired the queen-mother, with a feeling of the liveliest curiosity.

"Yes."

"Well, then, if it is Madame you wish to speak of, my son, do not hesitate. I am your mother, and she is no more than a stranger to me. Yet, as she is my daughter-in-law, be assured that I shall be interested, even were it for your own sake alone, in hearing all that you may have to say about her."

"Pray tell me, Madame, in your turn, whether you have not noticed something?"

"Something, Philip? Your words have an alarming vagueness. What do you mean by something?"

"Madame is pretty, certainly."

"No doubt of it."

"Yet not altogether beautiful."

"No; but as she matures she may still become very strikingly beautiful. You must have remarked the change which a few years have already made in her. Her beauty will improve more and more; she is now only sixteen years of age. At fifteen I was myself very thin; but even as she is at present, Madame is very pretty."

"And consequently others may have remarked it."

"Undoubtedly; for a woman of ordinary rank is observed, and with still greater reason a princess."

"She has been well brought up, I suppose, Madame?"

"Madame Henrietta, her mother, is a woman somewhat cold in her manner, slightly pretentious, but full of noble thoughts. The education of the young princess may have been neglected, but her principles I believe to be good. Such, at least, was the opinion I formed of her when she resided in France; but she afterwards returned

to England, and I am ignorant of what may have occurred there."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that there are some heads, naturally giddy, which are easily turned by prosperity."

"That is the very word, Madame. I think the princess rather giddy."

"We must not exaggerate, Philip. She is clever and witty, and has a certain amount of coquetry very natural in a young woman; but this defect is, in persons of high rank and position, a great advantage at a court. A princess who is tinged with coquetry usually forms a brilliant court around her; her smile stimulates luxury, and arouses wit and courage even; the nobles, too, fight better for a prince whose wife is beautiful."

"Thank you extremely, Madame," said Philip, with some temper; "you really have drawn some very alarming pictures for me, my mother."

"In what respect?" asked the queen, with pretended simplicity.

"You know, Madame," said Philip, dolefully, "whether I had or had not a very great dislike to getting married."

"Now, indeed, you alarm me; you have some serious cause of complaint against Madame?"

"I do not precisely say it is serious."

"In that case, then, throw aside your present mournful looks. If you show yourself in your palace in your present state, people will take you for a very unhappy husband."

"The fact is," replied Philip, "I am not altogether satisfied as a husband, and I shall be glad to have others know it."

"For shame, Philip!"

"Upon my word, Madame, I will tell you frankly that I do not understand the life I am required to lead."

"Explain yourself."

"My wife does not seem to belong to me; she is always leaving me for one reason or another. In the mornings there are visits, correspondence, and toilets; in the evenings, balls and concerts."

"You are jealous, Philip."

"I! Heaven forbid! Let others act the part of a jealous husband, — not I. But I am annoyed."

"Philip, all those things you reproach your wife with are perfectly innocent; and so long as you have nothing of greater importance — "

"Yet listen! Without being very blamable, a woman can excite a good deal of uneasiness; certain visitors may be received, certain preferences shown, which expose young women to remark, and which are enough to drive out of their senses even those husbands who are least disposed to be jealous."

"Ah! now we are coming to the real point at last, and not without some difficulty too. You speak of frequent visits and certain preferences, — very good; for the last hour we have been beating about the bush, and at last you have broached the real question."

"Well, yes — "

"This is more serious than I thought. Is it possible, then, that Madame can have given you grounds for these complaints against her?"

"Precisely so."

"What! your wife, married only four days ago, prefer some other person to yourself? Take care, Philip! You exaggerate your grievances; wishing to prove, proves nothing."

The prince, bewildered by his mother's serious manner, wished to reply, but could only stammer out some unintelligible words.

"You draw back, then?" said Anne of Austria. "I prefer that, as it is an acknowledgment of your mistake."

"No," exclaimed Philip, "I do not draw back, and I will prove all that I asserted. I spoke of preferences and of visits, did I not? Well, listen!"

Anne of Austria prepared to listen with that love of gossip which the best woman living and the best mother, were she a queen even, always finds in being mixed up with the petty squabbles of a household.

"Well," said Philip, "tell me one thing."

"What is that?"

"Why does my wife retain an English court about her?" and Philip crossed his arms and looked his mother steadily in the face, as if he were convinced that she could not answer the question.

"For a very simple reason," returned Anne of Austria; "because the English are her countrymen, because they have expended large sums in order to accompany her to France, and because it would be hardly polite — not good policy, certainly — to dismiss abruptly those members of the English nobility who have not shrunk from any devotion or from any sacrifice."

"A wonderful sacrifice, indeed, my mother, to desert a wretched country to come to a beautiful one, where a greater effect can be produced for one crown than can be procured elsewhere for four! Extraordinary devotion, really, to travel a hundred leagues in company with a woman one is in love with!"

"In love, Philip! Think what you are saying! Who is in love with Madame?"

"The handsome Duke of Buckingham. Perhaps you will defend him as well?"

Anne of Austria blushed and smiled at the same time. The name of the Duke of Buckingham recalled certain

recollections to her of a tender and melancholy nature. "The Duke of Buckingham!" she murmured.

"Yes; one of those feather-bed soldiers, as my grand father Henry IV. called them."

"The Buckinghams are loyal and brave," said Anne of Austria, courageously.

"This is too bad! my own mother takes the part of my wife's lover against me!" exclaimed Philip, incensed to such an extent that his weak organization was affected almost to tears.

"Philip, my son," exclaimed Anne of Austria, "such an expression is unworthy of you! Your wife has no lover; and had she one, it would not be the Duke of Buckingham. The members of that family, I repeat, are loyal and discreet, and the laws of hospitality are sacred with them."

"Eh, Madame!" cried Philip; "the Duke of Buckingham is an Englishman, and do the English so very religiously respect what belongs to the princes of France?"

Anne blushed to her temples a second time, and turned aside under the pretext of taking her pen from her desk again, but really to conceal her blushes from the eyes of her son. "Really, Philip," she said, "you seem to discover expressions for the purpose of embarrassing me, and your anger blinds you while it alarms me. Reflect a little!"

"There is no need of reflection, Madame, for I see with my own eyes."

"Well, and what do you see?"

"I see that the Duke of Buckingham never leaves my wife. He presumes to make presents to her, and she dares to accept them. Yesterday she spoke of *sachets à la violette;* well, our French perfumers, — you know very well, Madame, for you have over and over again asked for it without success, — our French perfumers, I say, have

never been able to procure this scent. The duke, however, wore about him a *sachet à la violette;* and I am sure that the one my wife has, came from him."

"Indeed, Monsieur," said Anne of Austria, "you build your pyramids upon needle-points. Be careful! What harm, I ask you, can there be in a man giving to his countrywoman a receipt for a new essence? These strange ideas, I protest, painfully recall to me your father, who so frequently and so unjustly made me suffer."

"The Duke of Buckingham's father was probably more reserved and more respectful than his son," said Philip, thoughtlessly, not perceiving how rudely he touched his mother's heart.

The queen turned pale, and pressed her hand nervously upon her bosom; but recovering herself immediately, she said, "You came here with a purpose of some kind, I suppose?"

"Certainly."

"What was it?"

"I came, Madame, intending to complain energetically, and to inform you that I will not submit to anything from the Duke of Buckingham."

"What do you intend to do, then?"

"I shall complain to the king."

"And what do you expect the king to reply?"

"Very well, then," said Monsieur, with an expression of stern determination on his countenance, which offered a singular contrast to its usual gentleness; "very well, I will right myself!"

"What do you call righting yourself?" inquired Anne of Austria, somewhat alarmed.

"I will have the Duke of Buckingham leave the princess, I will have him quit France, and I will see that my wishes are intimated to him."

"You will intimate nothing of the kind, Philip," said the queen; "for if you act in that manner, and violate hospitality to that extent, I will invoke the severity of the king against you."

"Do you threaten me, Madame!" exclaimed Philip, in tears; "do you threaten me in the midst of my complaints?"

"I do not threaten you; I do but place an obstacle in the path of your hasty anger. I maintain that to adopt towards the Duke of Buckingham, or any other Englishman, any rigorous measure, — to take even a discourteous step towards him, would be to hurry France and England into the saddest variances. Can it be possible that a prince of the blood, the brother of the King of France, does not know how to hide an injury, even did it exist in reality, where political necessity requires it?" Philip made a movement. "Besides," continued the queen, "the injury is neither actual nor possible, and we are considering merely a matter of absurd jealousy."

"Madame, I know what I know"

"Whatever you may know, I exhort you to be patient."

"I am not patient by disposition, Madame."

The queen rose, full of severity, and with an icy, ceremonious manner. "Then explain what you really require, Monsieur," said she.

"I do not require anything, Madame; I simply express what I desire. If the Duke of Buckingham does not of his own accord keep away from my apartments, I shall forbid him an entrance."

"That is a question we will refer to the king," said Anne of Austria, her heart swelling as she spoke, and her voice trembling with emotion.

"But, Madame," exclaimed Philip, striking his hands together, "act as my mother and not as the queen, since

I speak to you as a son; it is simply a matter of a few minutes' conversation between the duke and myself."

"It is that conversation which I forbid, Monsieur," said the queen, resuming her authority, "because it is unworthy of you."

"Be it so. I shall not appear in the matter, but I shall intimate my will to Madame."

"Oh," said Anne of Austria, with a melancholy arising from her recollections, "never tyrannize over a wife, my son, — never behave too imperiously towards yours! A woman conquered is not always convinced."

"What is to be done, then? I will consult my friends about it."

"Yes, your hypocritical advisers, — the Chevalier de Lorraine, your De Wardes. Intrust the conduct of this affair to me, Philip. You wish the Duke of Buckingham to leave, do you not?"

"As soon as possible, Madame."

"Send the duke to me, then. Smile upon him. Say nothing to your wife, the king, to any one. Follow no advice but mine. Alas! I too well know what a household is which is troubled by advisers."

"You shall be obeyed, Madame."

"And you will be satisfied at the result, Philip. Send the duke to me."

"That will not be difficult."

"Where do you suppose him to be?"

"*Pardieu!* at my wife's door, whose *levée* he is probably awaiting. That is beyond doubt."

"Very well," said Anne of Austria, calmly. "Be good enough to tell the duke that I beg him to come and see me."

Philip kissed his mother's hand, and set off to find the Duke of Buckingham.

CHAPTER XXII.

FOREVER!

THE Duke of Buckingham, obedient to the queen mother's invitation, presented himself in her apartments half an hour after the departure of the Duc d'Orléans. When his name was announced by the gentleman-usher in attendance, the queen, who was sitting with her elbows resting on a table and her head buried in her hands, rose, and smilingly received the graceful and respectful salutation which the duke addressed to her. Anne of Austria was still beautiful. It is well known that at her then somewhat advanced age, her long auburn hair, perfectly formed hands, and bright ruby lips were still the admiration of all who saw her. On the present occasion, abandoned entirely to a remembrance which evoked all the past in her heart, she was as beautiful as in the days of her youth, when her palace was open to the visits of the Duke of Buckingham's father, then a young and impassioned man, as well as an unfortunate one, who lived but for her alone, and who died with her name upon his lips. Anne of Austria fixed upon Buckingham a look so tender that it expressed at the same time the kindness of a maternal affection and a certain something like the coquetry of a woman who loves.

"Your Majesty," said Buckingham, respectfully, "desired to speak to me."

"Yes, Duke," said the queen, in English; "will you be good enough to sit down?"

The favor which Anne of Austria thus extended to the young man, and the welcome sound of the language of a country from which the duke had been estranged since his stay in France, deeply affected him. He immediately conjectured that the queen had a request to make of him.

After having abandoned the first few moments to the irrepressible emotion she experienced, the queen resumed the smiling air with which she had received him. "What do you think of France, Monsieur?" she said, in French.

"It is a lovely country, Madame," replied the duke.

"Have you ever seen it before?"

"Once only, Madame."

"But, like all true Englishmen, you prefer England?"

"I prefer my own native land to France," replied the duke; "but if your Majesty were to ask me which of the two cities, London or Paris, I should prefer as a residence, I should reply, Paris."

Anne of Austria observed the ardent tone in which these words were pronounced. "I am told, my Lord, that you have rich possessions in your own country, and that you live in a splendid and time-honored palace."

"It was my father's residence," replied Buckingham, casting down his eyes.

"Doubtless it possesses great advantages and precious remembrances," replied the queen, alluding, in spite of herself, to recollections which were of a very enduring character.

"In fact," said the duke, yielding to the melancholy influence of this opening conversation, "sensitive persons live as much in the past or in the future as in the present."

"That is very true," said the queen, in a low voice. "It follows, then, my Lord," she added, "that you, who are a man of feeling, will soon quit France in order to shut yourself up with your wealth and your relics of the past."

Buckingham raised his head and said, "I think not, Madame."

"What do you mean?"

"On the contrary, I think of leaving England in order to take up my residence in France."

It was now Anne of Austria's turn to exhibit surprise. "Why?" she said. "Are you not in favor with the new king?"

"Perfectly so, Madame, for his Majesty's kindness to me is unbounded."

"It cannot be because your fortune has diminished," said the queen, "for it is said to be considerable."

"My fortune, Madame, has never been more thriving."

"There is some secret cause, then?"

"No, Madame," said Buckingham, eagerly, "there is nothing secret in my reason for this determination. I like living in France; I like a court so distinguished by its refinement and courtesy; I like those amusements, a trifle serious, which are not the amusements of my own country, and which are met with in France."

Anne of Austria smiled shrewdly. "Amusements of a serious nature?" she said. "Has your Grace well considered their seriousness?" The duke hesitated. "There is no amusement so serious," continued the queen, "as should prevent a man of your rank —"

"Your Majesty seems to insist greatly upon that point," interrupted the duke.

"Do you think so, my Lord?"

"If your Majesty will forgive me for saying so, it is the second time you have vaunted the attractions of England at the expense of the charm of living in France."

Anne of Austria approached the young man, and placing her beautiful hand upon his shoulder, which trembled at the touch, said: "Believe me, Monsieur, nothing can

equal the charm of a residence in one's own native country. I have very frequently had occasion to long for Spain. I have lived long, my Lord, very long for a woman; and I confess to you that not a year has passed in which I have not longed for Spain."

"Not one year, Madame?" said the young duke, coldly. "Not one of those years when you reigned queen of beauty, — as you still are, indeed?"

"A truce to flattery, Duke, for I am old enough to be your mother." She emphasized these latter words in a manner and with a gentleness which penetrated Buckingham's heart. "Yes," she said, "I am old enough to be your mother; and for this reason I will give you a word of advice."

"That advice being that I should return to London?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, my Lord."

The duke clasped his hands with a terrified gesture, which could not fail of its effect upon the queen, already disposed to softer feelings by the tenderness of her own recollections.

"It must be so," added the queen.

"What!" he again exclaimed, "am I seriously told that I *must* leave, that I must exile myself, that I am to flee at once?"

"Exile yourself, did you say? Why, my Lord, one would fancy that France was your native country."

"Madame, the country of those who love is the country of those whom they love."

"Not another word, my Lord; you forget whom you are addressing."

Buckingham threw himself on his knees. "Madame, you are the source of intelligence, of goodness, and of compassion; you are not only the first person in this kingdom

by your rank, but the first person in the world on account of your angelic attributes. I have said nothing, Madame. Have I, indeed, said anything to which you should reply in words so cruel? Can I have betrayed myself?"

"You have betrayed yourself," said the queen, in a low voice.

"I have said nothing, — I know nothing."

"You forget you have spoken and thought in the presence of a woman; and besides — "

"Besides," interrupted the duke, eagerly, "no one knows that you are listening to me."

"On the contrary, it is known, Duke, that you have the defects and the virtues of youth."

"I have been betrayed or denounced, then?"

"By whom?"

"By those who at Havre had, with infernal perspicacity, read my heart like an open book."

"I do not know whom you mean."

"M. de Bragelonne, for instance."

"I know the name without being acquainted with the person to whom it belongs. No, M. de Bragelonne has said nothing."

"Who can it be, then? If any one, Madame, had had the boldness to notice in me that which I do not myself wish to behold — "

"What would you do, Duke?"

"There are secrets which kill those who discover them."

"He, then, who has discovered your secret, madman that you are, still lives; and, what is more, you will not slay him, for he is armed on all sides, — he is a husband, a jealous man, — he is the second gentleman in France, — he is my son, the Duc d'Orléans."

The duke turned pale as death. "How cruel you are, Madame!" said he.

"You see, Buckingham," said Anne of Austria, sadly, "how you pass from one extreme to another, and fight with shadows, when it would seem so easy to remain at peace with yourself."

"If we fight, Madame, we die on the field of battle," replied the young man gently, abandoning himself to the most gloomy depression.

Anne ran towards him and took him by the hand. "Villiers," she said, in English, with a vehemence of tone which nothing could resist, "what is it you ask? Do you ask a mother to sacrifice her son, — a queen to consent to the dishonor of her house? Child that you are, do not think of it. What! in order to spare your tears, am I to commit these two crimes, Villiers? You speak of the dead: the dead, at least, were respectful and submissive; they resigned themselves to an order of exile; they carried their despair away with them in their hearts, like a priceless possession, because the despair was caused by the woman they loved, and because death, thus disguised, was like a gift or a favor conferred upon them."

Buckingham rose, his features distorted, and his hands pressed against his heart. "You are right, Madame," he said; "but those of whom you speak had received their order of exile from the lips of the one whom they loved; they were not driven away, — they were entreated to leave, and were not laughed at."

"No," murmured Anne of Austria, "they were not forgotten! But who says that you are driven away, or that you are exiled? Who says that your devotion will not be remembered? I do not speak on any one's behalf but my own, when I tell you to leave. Do me this kindness, — grant me this favor; let me for this, also, be indebted to one of your name."

"It is for your sake, then, Madame?"

"For mine alone."

"There will be no one left behind me who will venture to mock,—no prince, even, who shall say, 'I required it'?"

"Listen to me, Duke!" and hereupon the august features of the aged queen assumed a solemn expression. "I swear to you that no one commands in this matter but myself. I swear to you that not only shall no one either laugh or boast in any way, but no one even shall fail in the respect due to your rank. Rely upon me, Duke, as I rely upon you."

"You do not explain yourself, Madame; my heart is full of bitterness, and I am in utter despair; no consolation, however gentle and affectionate it may be, can afford me relief."

"Do you remember your mother, Duke?" replied the queen, with a winning smile.

"Very slightly, Madame; yet I remember how that noble lady used to cover me with her caresses and her tears whenever I wept."

"Villiers," murmured the queen, passing her arm round the young man's neck, "look upon me as your mother, and believe that no one shall ever make my son weep."

"I thank you, Madame," said the young man, affected and almost suffocated by his emotion; "I feel that there is indeed still room in my heart for a gentler and nobler sentiment than love."

The queen-mother gazed at him and pressed his hand. "Go!" she said.

"When must I leave? Command me."

"Any time that may suit you, my Lord," resumed the queen; "you will choose your own day of departure. Instead, however, of setting off to-day, as you would doubtless wish to do, or to-morrow, as others may have

expected, leave the day after to-morrow, in the evening, but announce to-day that it is your wish to leave."

"My wish?" murmured the young man.

"Yes, Duke."

"And — shall I never return to France?"

Anne of Austria reflected for a moment, seemingly absorbed in sad and serious thought. "It would be a consolation for me," she said, "if you were to return on the day when I shall be carried to my final resting-place at St. Denis, beside the king my husband."

"Madame, you are goodness itself. The tide of prosperity is setting in upon you; your cup brims over with happiness, and many long years are yet before you."

"In that case you will not come for some time, then," said the queen, endeavoring to smile.

"I shall not return," said Buckingham, sadly, "young as I am. Death, Madame, does not reckon by years, — it is impartial, some die young, others live on to old age."

"Away with gloomy ideas, Duke! Let me comfort you. Return in two years. I read in your charming face that the very ideas which sadden you so much now will have disappeared before six months shall have passed, and will be all dead and forgotten in the period of absence I have assigned to you."

"I think you judged me better a little while since, Madame," replied the young man, "when you said that time is powerless against members of the family of Buckingham."

"Silence!" said the queen, kissing the duke upon the forehead with an affection which she could not restrain. "Go, go! spare me, and forget yourself no longer. I am the queen. You are the subject of the King of England; King Charles awaits your return. Adieu, Villiers, — farewell!"

"Forever!" replied the young man; and he fled, endeavoring to master his emotion.

Anne leaned her head upon her hands, and then, looking at herself in the glass, murmured, "It has been truly said that a woman is always young, and that the age of twenty years always lies concealed in some secret corner of the heart."

CHAPTER XXIII.

KING LOUIS XIV. DOES NOT THINK MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE EITHER RICH ENOUGH OR PRETTY ENOUGH FOR A GENTLEMAN OF THE RANK OF THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE.

RAOUL and the Comte de la Fère reached Paris the evening of the same day on which Buckingham had had the conversation with the queen-mother. The count had scarcely arrived, when, through Raoul, he solicited an audience of the king. His Majesty had passed a portion of the day in looking over, with Madame and the ladies of the court, various goods of Lyons manufacture of which he had made his sister-in-law a present. A court dinner had succeeded, then cards; and afterwards, according to his usual custom, the king, leaving the card-tables at eight o'clock, had passed into his cabinet in order to work with M. Colbert and M. Fouquet.

Raoul was in the antechamber when the two ministers went out, and the king, perceiving him through the half-closed door, said, "What does M. de Bragelonne want?"

The young man approached. "An audience, Sire," he replied, "for the Comte de la Fère, who has just arrived from Blois, and is most anxious to have an interview with your Majesty."

"I have an hour to spare between cards and my supper," said the king. "Is the Comte de la Fère ready?"

"He is below, and awaits your Majesty's commands."

"Let him come at once," said the king; and five minutes afterwards Athos entered the presence of Louis XIV. He was received by the king with that gracious kindness of manner which Louis, with a tact beyond his years, reserved for the purpose of gaining those men who were not to be conquered by ordinary favors. "Let me hope, Count," said the king, "that you have come to ask me for something."

"I will not conceal from your Majesty," replied the count, "that I have indeed come for that purpose."

"That is well, then," said the king, joyously.

"It is not for myself, Sire."

"So much the worse, but at least I will do for your *protégé* what you refuse to permit me to do for you."

"Your Majesty encourages me. I have come to speak on behalf of the Vicomte de Bragelonne."

"It is the same as if you spoke on your own behalf, Count."

"Not altogether so, Sire. That which I am desirous of obtaining from your Majesty I cannot obtain for myself. The viscount thinks of marrying."

"He is still very young; but that does not matter. He is an eminently distinguished man. I will choose a wife for him."

"He has already chosen one, Sire, and only awaits your Majesty's consent."

"It is only a question, then, of signing the marriage contract?" Athos bowed. "Has he chosen a wife whose fortune and position accord with your own views?"

Athos hesitated for a moment. "His betrothed is of good birth, but has no fortune."

"That is a misfortune which we can remedy."

"You overwhelm me with gratitude, Sire; but your Majesty will permit me to offer a remark?"

"Do so, Count."

"Your Majesty seems to intimate an intention of giving a marriage portion to this young girl?"

"Certainly."

"I should regret, Sire, if the application I make your Majesty should have that result."

"No false delicacy, Count; what is the bride's name?"

"Mademoiselle la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière," said Athos, coldly.

"Ah!" said the king, searching his memory, "I know that name; there was a Marquis de la Vallière."

"Yes, Sire, it is his daughter."

"But he died, and his widow was married again to M. de Saint-Remy, I think, steward of the dowager Madame's household."

"Your Majesty is correctly informed."

"More than that, the young lady has lately become one of the princess's maids of honor."

"Your Majesty is better acquainted with her history than I am."

The king again reflected, and glancing at the count's anxious countenance, said. "The young lady does not seem to me to be very pretty, Count."

"I am not quite sure," replied Athos.

"I have seen her, but she did not strike me as being so."

"She seems to be a sweet and modest girl, but has little beauty, Sire."

"Beautiful fair hair, however?"

"I think so."

"And quite beautiful blue eyes?"

"Yes, Sire."

"With regard to beauty, then, the match is but an ordinary one. Now for the money side of the question."

"From fifteen to twenty thousand livres' dowry at the

very outside, Sire. But the lovers are disinterested enough; for myself, I care little for money."

"For superfluity, you mean; but a needful amount is of importance. With fifteen thousand livres, without landed property, a woman cannot live at court We will make up the deficiency; I will do it for Bragelonne."

The king again noticed the coldness with which Athos received his remark.

"Let us pass from the question of money to that of rank," said Louis XIV. "The daughter of the Marquis de la Vallière, that is well enough; but there is that excellent Saint-Remy, who somewhat damages the family, — on the women's side, I know, but damaging all the same, — and you, Count, are rather particular, I believe, about your own family."

"Sire, I no longer hold to anything but my devotion to your Majesty."

The king again paused. "A moment, Count. You have surprised me in no little degree from the beginning of our conversation. You come to ask me to authorize a marriage, and you seem greatly disturbed in having to make the request. Nay, pardon me, Count, but I am rarely deceived, young as I am; for while with some persons I place my friendship at the disposal of my understanding, with others I call my distrust to my aid, by which my discernment is increased. I repeat that you do not prefer your request as though you wished it success."

"Well, Sire, that is true."

"I do not understand you, then; refuse."

"Nay, Sire: I love Bragelonne with my whole heart; he is smitten with Mademoiselle de la Vallière, he weaves dreams of bliss for the future; I am not one who is willing to destroy the illusions of youth. This marriage is

objectionable to me, but I implore your Majesty to consent to it forthwith, and thus make Raoul happy."

"Tell me, Count, is she in love with him?"

"If your Majesty requires me to speak candidly, I do not believe in Mademoiselle de la Vallière's affection. She is young, she is a child, she is intoxicated with joy; the delight of being at court, the honor of being in the service of Madame, counteract in her head whatever affection she may have in her heart. It is a marriage similar to many others which your Majesty has seen at court; but Bragelonne wishes it, and let it be so."

"And yet you do not resemble those easy-tempered fathers who make slaves of themselves for their children," said the king.

"Sire, I am determined enough against the viciously disposed, but not so against men of upright character. Raoul is suffering, and is in great distress of mind; his disposition, naturally light and cheerful, has become heavy and melancholy. I do not wish to deprive your Majesty of the services he may be able to render."

"I understand you," said the king; "and what is more, I understand your heart, too, Count."

"There is no occasion, therefore," replied the count, "to tell your Majesty that my object is to make these children, or rather Raoul, happy."

"And I too, as much as yourself, Count, wish to secure M. de Bragelonne's happiness."

"I only await your Majesty's signature. Raoul will have the honor of presenting himself before you to receive your consent."

"You are mistaken, Count," said the king, firmly; "I have just said that I desire to secure the viscount's happiness, and from the present moment, therefore, I oppose his marriage."

"But, Sire," exclaimed Athos, "your Majesty has promised!"

"Not so, Count; I did not promise you, for it is opposed to my own views."

"I appreciate all your Majesty's considerate and generous intentions in my behalf; but I take the liberty of recalling to you that I undertook to approach your Majesty as an ambassador."

"An ambassador, Count, frequently asks, but does not always obtain what he asks."

"But, Sire, it will be such a blow for Bragelonne"

"My hand shall deal the blow; I will speak to the viscount."

"Love, Sire, is overwhelming in its might."

"Love can be resisted, Count; I myself can assure you of that."

"When one has the soul of a king, — your soul, Sire."

"Do not make yourself uneasy upon the subject. I have certain views for Bragelonne. I do not say that he shall not marry Mademoiselle de la Vallière, but I do not wish him to marry so young. I do not wish him to marry her until she has acquired a fortune, and he, on his side, no less deserves my favor, such as I wish to confer upon him. In a word, Count, I wish them to wait."

"Yet once more, Sire."

"Monsieur the Count, you told me you came to request a favor."

"Assuredly, Sire."

"Grant me one, then, instead, — let us speak no longer upon this matter. It is probable that before long war may be declared; I require men about me who are unfettered. I should hesitate to send under fire a married man or a father of a family; I should hesitate, also, on Bragelonne's account, to endow with a fortune, without

some sound reason for it, a young girl, a perfect stranger; such an act would sow jealousy among my nobility."

Athos bowed, and remained silent.

"Is that all you had to ask me?" added Louis XIV.

"Absolutely all, Sire; and I take my leave of your Majesty. Is it, however, necessary that I should inform Raoul?"

"Spare yourself the trouble and annoyance. Tell the viscount that at my *levée* to-morrow morning I will speak to him. I shall expect you this evening, Count, to join my card-table."

"I am in travelling-costume, Sire."

"A day will come, I hope, when you will leave me no more. Before long, Count, the monarchy will be established in such a manner as to enable me to offer a worthy hospitality to all men of your merit."

"Provided, Sire, a monarch reigns truly great in the hearts of his subjects, the palace he inhabits matters little, since he is worshipped in a temple."

With these words Athos left the cabinet, and found Bragelonne, who awaited his return.

"Well, Monsieur?" said the young man.

"The king, Raoul, is well disposed towards us both; not, perhaps, in the sense you suppose, but he is kind, and generously disposed towards our house."

"You have bad news to communicate to me, Monsieur," said the young man, turning very pale.

"The king will himself inform you to-morrow morning that it is not bad news."

"The king has not signed, however?"

"The king wishes himself to settle the terms of the contract, Raoul, and he desires to make it so grand that he requires time for it. Throw the blame rather on your own impatience than on the king's good-will."

Raoul, in utter consternation, because he knew the count's frankness as well as his tact, remained plunged in a dull, heavy stupor.

"Will you not go with me to my lodgings?" said Athos.

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur; I will follow you," Raoul stammered out, following Athos down the staircase.

"Since I am here," said Athos, suddenly, "cannot I see M. d'Artagnan?"

"Shall I show you to his apartment?" said Bragelonne.

"Do so."

"It is on the other staircase, then."

They altered their course, but as they reached the landing of the grand gallery, Raoul perceived a servant in the Comte de Guiche's livery, who ran towards him as soon as he heard his voice.

"What is it?" said Raoul.

"This note, Monsieur. Monsieur the Count heard of your return, and wrote to you without delay. I have been seeking you for the last hour."

Raoul approached Athos as he unsealed the letter, saying, "With your permission, Monsieur."

"Certainly."

DEAR RAOUL, — I have an affair in hand which requires immediate attention. I know you have returned; come to me as soon as possible.

DE GUICHE.

Hardly had he finished reading it, when a servant in the livery of the Duke of Buckingham, turning out of the gallery, recognized Raoul, and approached him respectfully, saying, "From his Grace the duke."

"Well, Raoul, as I see you are already as busy as a general of an army, I will leave you, and will find M. d'Artagnan myself."

"You will excuse me, I trust," said Raoul.

"Yes, yes, I excuse you. Adieu, Raoul! You will find me at my apartments until to-morrow; during the day I may set out for Blois, unless I have orders to the contrary."

"I shall present my respects to you to-morrow, Monsieur."

When Athos had left, Raoul opened Buckingham's letter.

MONSIEUR DE BRAGELONNE, — You are, of all the Frenchmen I have known, the one with whom I am most pleased. I am about to put your friendship to the proof. I have received a certain message, written in very good French. As I am an Englishman, I am afraid of not comprehending it very clearly. The letter has a good name attached to it, and that is all I can tell you. Will you be obliging enough to come and see me, for I am told you have arrived from Blois?

Your devoted

VILLIERS, *Duke of Buckingham.*

"I am going now to see your master," said Raoul to De Guiche's servant as he dismissed him; "and I shall be with the Duke of Buckingham in an hour," he added, dismissing with these words the duke's messenger.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SWORD-THRUSTS IN THE WATER.

RAOUL, on betaking himself to De Guiche, found him conversing with De Wardes and Manicamp. De Wardes, since the affair of the barricade, had treated Raoul as a stranger. It might have been imagined that nothing at all had passed between them; they only behaved as if they were not acquainted. As Raoul entered, De Guiche walked up to him, and Raoul, as he grasped his friend's hand, glanced rapidly at his two young companions, hoping to be able to read on their faces what was passing in their minds. De Wardes was cold and impenetrable, and Manicamp seemed absorbed in the contemplation of some trimming to his dress.

De Guiche led Raoul to an adjoining cabinet, and made him sit down, saying, "How well you look!"

"That is rather strange," replied Raoul, "for I am far from being in good spirits."

"Your case is the same as mine, then, Raoul, — your love-affair is not going well."

"So much the better, Count, so far as you are concerned; the worst news, that which would distress me most of all, would be good news."

"In that case do not distress yourself, for not only am I very unhappy, but, what is more, I see people about me who are happy."

"Really, I do not understand you," replied Raoul, "explain yourself, my friend."

"You will soon learn. I have tried, but in vain, to overcome the feeling which you saw dawn in me, increase in me, and take such entire possession of me. I have summoned all your advice and all my own strength to my aid. I have well considered the unfortunate affair in which I have embarked. I have sounded its depths; that it is an abyss, I am well aware. But it matters little; I shall pursue my own course."

"Madman! you cannot advance another step without inviting ruin to-day, death to-morrow."

"Come what may!"

"De Guiche!"

"I have done with reflections; listen!"

"And you hope to succeed; you believe that Madame will love you?"

"Raoul, I believe nothing; I hope, because hope exists in man, and accompanies him even to the grave."

"But, admitting that you obtain the happiness which you covet, even then you are more certainly lost than if you had not obtained it."

"I beseech you, Raoul, not to interrupt me any more. You could never convince me, for I tell you beforehand that I do not wish to be convinced. I have gone so far that I cannot recede; I have suffered so much that death itself would be a boon. I now not only love to madness, Raoul, I am also in a perfect rage of jealousy."

Raoul struck his hands together with an expression not unlike anger. "Well?" said he.

"Well or ill, it matters little. This is what I claim

from you, my friend, my brother. During the last three days Madame has been living in a perfect intoxication of gayety. On the first day I dared not look at her, I hated her for not being as unhappy as myself. The next day I could not bear to lose sight of her, and she, Raoul, — at least I thought I noticed it, — she looked at me, if not with pity, at least with gentleness. But between her looks and mine a shadow intervened; another's smile invited her smile. Beside her horse another always gallops, which is not mine; in her ear a caressing voice, not mine, unceasingly vibrates. Raoul, for three days past my brain has been on fire; fire courses through my veins. That shadow must be driven away; that smile must be quenched; that voice must be silenced!"

"You wish Monsieur's death?" exclaimed Raoul.

"No, no! I am not jealous of Monsieur; I am not jealous of the husband, I am jealous of the lover."

"Of the lover?" said Raoul.

"Have you not observed it, — you, who were formerly so keen-sighted?"

"Are you jealous of M. de Buckingham?"

"To the very death!"

"Again jealous?"

"This time the affair will be easy to arrange between us; I have taken the initiative, and have sent him a letter."

"It was you, then, who wrote to him!"

"How do you know that?"

"I know it because he told me so. Look at this!" and he handed to De Guiche the letter which he had received nearly at the same moment as his own.

De Guiche read it eagerly, and said, "He is a brave man; and more than that, a gallant man."

"Most certainly the duke is a gallant man; I need not ask if you wrote to him in as good a style."

"He will show you my letter when you call on him on my behalf."

"But that is almost out of the question."

"What is?"

"That I should call on him for that purpose."

"Why so?"

"The duke consults me as you do."

"Oh! But you will give me the preference, I suppose. Now listen! here is what I beg you to tell his Grace, — it is a very simple matter, — to-day, to-morrow, the following day, or any other day he may choose, I wish to meet him at Vincennes."

"Reflect, De Guiche!"

"I thought I had already said that I had reflected."

"The duke is a stranger here; he is on a mission which renders him inviolable — Vincennes is close to the Bastille."

"The consequences concern me."

"But the motive for this meeting? What motive do you wish me to assign?"

"Never fear! He will not ask any. The duke must be as sick of me as I am of him; he must hate me as I hate him. I implore you, therefore, to seek the duke; and if it is necessary to entreat him to accept my proposition, I will do that."

"That is useless. The duke has already informed me that he wishes to speak to me. The duke is now at play with the king. Let us both go there. I will draw him aside in the gallery; you will remain aloof. Two words will be sufficient."

"Very well. I shall take De Wardes to keep me in countenance."

"Why not Manicamp? De Wardes can rejoin us at any time; we can leave him here."

"Yes, that is true."

"He knows nothing?"

"Positively nothing. You continue still on cool terms, then?"

"Has he not told you anything?"

"No."

"I do not like the man; and as I never liked him, the result is that I am on no worse terms with him to-day than I was yesterday."

"Let us go, then."

The four descended the stairs. De Guiche's carriage was waiting at the door, and took them to the Palais-Royal. As they went along, Raoul was engaged in framing some scheme. The sole depositary of two secrets, he did not despair of concluding some arrangement between the two parties. He knew the influence he exercised over Buckingham, and the ascendency he had acquired over De Guiche; and affairs did not look utterly desperate to him.

On their arrival in the gallery, dazzling with the blaze of light, where the most beautiful and illustrious women of the court moved to and fro, like stars in their atmosphere of light, Raoul could not help forgetting De Guiche for a moment in order to seek out Louise, who amid her companions, like a dove completely fascinated, gazed long and fixedly upon the royal circle, which glittered with jewels and gold. The men were standing, the king alone being seated. Raoul perceived Buckingham, who was standing a few paces from Monsieur, in a group of French and English, who were admiring his haughty carriage and the incomparable magnificence of his costume. Some few of the older courtiers remembered having seen the father, and their remembrance was in no way prejudicial to the son.

Buckingham was conversing with Fouquet, who was talking with him of Belle-Isle. "I cannot speak to him at present," said Raoul.

"Wait, then, and choose your opportunity, but finish everything speedily. I am on thorns"

"See! our deliverer approaches," said Raoul, perceiving D'Artagnan, who, magnificently dressed in his new uniform of captain of the Musketeers, had just made his victorious entry in the gallery; and he advanced towards D'Artagnan.

"The Comte de la Fère has been looking for you, Chevalier," said Raoul.

"Yes," replied D'Artagnan, "I have just left him."

"I thought you would have passed a portion of the evening together."

"We have arranged to meet again."

As he answered Raoul, his wandering looks were directed on all sides, as if seeking some one in the crowd or looking for something in the room. Suddenly his gaze became fixed, like that of an eagle which perceives its prey. Raoul followed the direction of his glance, and noticed that De Guiche and D'Artagnan saluted each other, but he could not distinguish at whom the captain's inquiring and haughty glance was directed.

"Chevalier," said Raoul, "there is no one here but yourself who can render me a service."

"What is it, my dear viscount?"

"It is simply to go and interrupt the Duke of Buckingham, to whom I have a word or two to say; and as the duke is conversing with M. Fouquet, you understand that it would not do for me to break into the middle of the conversation."

"Ah! is M. Fouquet there?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"Do you not see him? — There!"

"Yes, now I do. But do you think I have a better right than you?"

"You are a far more important personage."

"Yes, you're right; I am captain of the Musketeers. I have had the post promised me so long, and have enjoyed it for so brief a period that I am always forgetting my dignity."

"You will do me the service, will you not?"

"M. Fouquet — the deuce!"

"Are you not on good terms with him?"

"It is rather he who may not be on good terms with me; however, since it will be necessary that some day or other —"

"Stay! I think he is looking at you; or can it really be —"

"No, no, don't deceive yourself; it is indeed me for whom this honor is intended."

"The opportunity is a good one, then."

"Do you think so?"

"Pray go."

"I am going."

De Guiche had not lost sight of Raoul, who made a sign to him that all was arranged. D'Artagnan walked straight up to the group, and courteously saluted M. Fouquet as well as the others.

"Good-evening, M. d'Artagnan; we were speaking of Belle-Isle-en-Mer," said Fouquet, with that perfect knowledge of the usages of society and of the language of the eyes which it requires half a lifetime thoroughly to acquire, and which some persons notwithstanding all their study never attain.

"Of Belle-Isle-en-Mer? Ah!" said D'Artagnan. "It belongs to you, I believe, M. Fouquet?"

"M. Fouquet has just told me that he had presented it to the king," said Buckingham.

"Do you know Belle-Isle, Chevalier?" inquired Fouquet, of the musketeer.

"I have been there only once," replied D'Artagnan, with readiness and good humor.

"Did you remain there long?"

"Scarcely a day, Monseigneur."

"Did you see much of it?"

"All that could be seen in a day."

"A day amounts to a great deal with an observation as keen as yours," said Fouquet; at which D'Artagnan bowed.

During this Raoul made a sign to Buckingham. "M. Fouquet," said Buckingham, "I leave the captain with you; he is more learned than I am in bastions and scarps and counterscarps, and I will join one of my friends, who has just beckoned to me." Saying this, Buckingham disengaged himself from the group, and advanced towards Raoul, stopping for a moment at the table where the queen-mother, the young queen, and the king were playing together. "Now, Raoul," said De Guiche, "there he is; be firm and quick!"

Buckingham, after having made some complimentary remark to Madame, continued his way towards Raoul, who advanced to meet him, while De Guiche remained in his place, though he followed him with his eyes. The manœuvre was so arranged that the young men met in an open space which was left vacant between the group of players and the gallery, where were walking some of the graver courtiers, who stopped now and then to converse. But at the moment when the two lines were about to unite, they were broken by a third. It was Monsieur, who advanced towards the Duke of Buckingham. Monsieur had his most engaging smile on his red and perfumed lips.

"My dear duke," said he, with the most affectionate politeness, "is it true what I have just been told?"

Buckingham turned round; he had not noticed Monsieur approach, but had merely heard his voice. He started, in spite of himself, and a slight pallor overspread his face. "Monseigneur," he asked, "what have they told your Highness that astonishes you so much?"

"That which throws me into despair, and will in truth be a real cause of mourning for the whole court."

"Your Highness is very kind, for I perceive that you allude to my departure."

"Precisely."

"Alas, Monseigneur, having been in Paris scarcely five or six days, my departure can be a source of grief only to myself."

De Guiche had overheard the conversation from where he was standing, and started in his turn. "His departure!" he murmured. "What is he saying?"

Philip continued with the same gracious air: "I can easily conceive, Monsieur, why the King of Great Britain recalls you; we all know that King Charles II., who appreciates true gentlemen, cannot dispense with you. But it cannot be supposed that we can let you go without great regret, and I beg you to receive the expression of my own."

"Believe me, Monseigneur," said the duke, "that if I leave the Court of France —"

"It is because you are recalled, I understand that; but if you think that the expression of my own wish on the subject may have some weight with the king, I will gladly volunteer to entreat his Majesty Charles II. to leave you with us a little while longer."

"I am overwhelmed, Monseigneur, by so much kindness," replied Buckingham; "but I have received positive

commands. My stay in France was limited; I have prolonged it at the risk of displeasing my gracious sovereign. It is only this very day that I recollected I ought to have set off four days ago."

"Indeed," said Monsieur.

"Yes; but," added Buckingham, raising his voice in such a manner that the princess could hear him, — "but I resemble that dweller in the East, who went mad, and remained so for several days, owing to a delightful dream that he had had, and who one day awoke, if not completely cured, in some respects rational at least. The Court of France has its intoxicating properties, which are not unlike this dream, my Lord; but at last I wake and leave it. I shall be unable, therefore, to prolong my stay as your Highness has so kindly invited me."

"When do you leave?" inquired Philip, with an expression full of interest.

"To-morrow, Monseigneur. My carriages have been ready for three days past."

The Duc d'Orléans made a movement of the head, which seemed to signify, "Since you are determined, Duke, there is nothing to be said."

Buckingham raised his eyes to the princesses; his glance met that of Anne of Austria, who thanked him and showed her approval by a gesture. Buckingham returned the gesture, concealing under a smile his heart's anguish; and then Monsieur moved away in the same direction by which he had approached. At the same moment, however, De Guiche advanced from the opposite side. Raoul feared that the impatient young man was coming to make the proposition himself, and hurried forward before him.

"No, no, Raoul; all is useless now," said De Guiche, holding both his hands towards the duke, and leading him

behind a column. "Oh, Duke, Duke!" said he, "forgive me for what I wrote to you! I was mad; give me back my letter!"

"It is true," replied the young duke, with a melancholy smile, "that you cannot owe me a grudge any longer now."

"Forgive me, Duke; my friendship, my lasting friendship, is yours."

"Why indeed, Count, should you bear me any ill-will from the moment I leave her never to see her again?"

Raoul heard these words, and comprehending that his presence was useless between the two young men, who had now only friendly words to exchange, withdrew a few paces, — a movement which brought him closer to De Wardes, who was conversing with the Chevalier de Lorraine respecting the departure of Buckingham.

"A wise retreat," said De Wardes.

"Why so?"

"Because the dear duke saves a sword-thrust by it;" and both began to laugh.

Raoul, indignant, turned round with brow contracted, flushed with anger, and his lip curling with disdain. The Chevalier de Lorraine turned away upon his heel, but De Wardes remained firm and waited. "Will you never break yourself of the habit of insulting the absent?" said Raoul to De Wardes. "Yesterday it was M. d'Artagnan; to-day it is the Duke of Buckingham."

"You know very well, Monsieur," returned De Wardes, "that I sometimes insult those who are present."

De Wardes touched Raoul; their shoulders met, their faces were bent towards each other, as if to be mutually inflamed by the fire of their breath and of their anger. It could be seen that the one was at the height of his anger, the other at the end of his patience. Suddenly a

voice was heard behind them full of grace and courtesy, saying, "I believe I heard my name pronounced."

They turned round and saw D'Artagnan, who with a smiling eye and a cheerful face had just placed his hand on De Wardes's shoulder. Raoul stepped back to make room for the musketeer. De Wardes trembled from head to foot, turned pale, but did not move. D'Artagnan, still with the same smile, took the place which Raoul abandoned to him. "Thank you, my dear Raoul," he said. "M. de Wardes, I wish to talk with you. Do not leave us, Raoul; every one can hear what I have to say to M. de Wardes" Then his smile faded away, and his glance became cold and sharp as a steel blade.

"I am at your orders, Monsieur," said De Wardes.

"For a very long time, Monsieur," resumed D'Artagnan, "I have sought an opportunity of conversing with you; to day is the first time I have found it. The place is badly chosen, I admit; but if you will take the trouble to come to my apartments, which are on the staircase at the end of this gallery —"

"I will follow you, Monsieur," said De Wardes.

"Are you alone here?" said D'Artagnan.

"No; I have M. Manicamp and M. de Guiche, two of my friends."

"That is well," said D'Artagnan. "But two persons are not sufficient; you will be able to find a few others, I trust."

"Certainly," said the young man, who did not know the object which D'Artagnan had in view. "As many as you please."

"Friends?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Real friends?"

"No doubt of it."

"Very well; get a good supply, then. Do you come too, Raoul; bring M. de Guiche and the Duke of Buckingham, if you please."

"What an ado!" replied De Wardes, attempting to smile. The captain made him a slight sign with his hand, as though to recommend him to be patient. "I never get excited," said he. "Well, then, I shall expect you, Monsieur."

"I will be there."

"Till then, *au revoir!*" and he led the way to his apartments.

D'Artagnan's apartment was not unoccupied; the Comte de la Fère, seated in the recess of a window, awaited him. "Well," said he to D'Artagnan, as he saw him enter.

"Well," said the latter, "M. de Wardes has done me the honor to pay me a visit, in company with some of his own friends as well as of ours."

In fact, behind the musketeer appeared De Wardes and Manicamp, followed by De Guiche and Buckingham, who looked surprised, not knowing what was expected of them. Raoul was accompanied by two or three gentlemen; and as he entered, he looked all around the room, and perceiving the count, went and placed himself by his side. D'Artagnan received his visitors with all the courtesy of which he was capable; he preserved his unmoved and unruffled look. All the persons present were men of distinction, occupying positions at court. After he had apologized to each of them for any inconvenience he might have caused them, D'Artagnan turned towards De Wardes, who, in spite of his great self-command, could not prevent his face from betraying some surprise mingled with uneasiness.

"Now, Monsieur," said D'Artagnan, "since we are no

longer within the precincts of the king's palace, and since we can speak out without failing in respect to propriety, I will inform you why I have taken the liberty to request you to visit me here, and why I have invited these gentlemen to be present at the same time. My friend, the Comte de la Fère, has acquainted me with the injurious reports you are spreading about myself. You have stated that you regard me as your mortal enemy, because I was, so you affirm, that of your father."

"Perfectly true, Monsieur; I have said so," replied De Wardes, whose pallid face became slightly tinged with color.

"You accuse me, therefore, of a crime, or of a fault, or of some mean and cowardly act. Have the goodness to state your charge against me in precise terms."

"In the presence of witnesses?"

"Most certainly in the presence of witnesses; and you see I have selected them as being experienced in affairs of honor."

"You do not appreciate my delicacy, Monsieur. I have accused you, it is true, but I have kept the nature of the accusation a secret. I have not entered into any details, but have contented myself with expressing my hatred in the presence of those on whom a duty was almost imposed to acquaint you with it. You have not taken into consideration the discreetness I have shown, although you were interested in my remaining silent. I can hardly recognize your customary prudence in that, M. d'Artagnan."

D'Artagnan, who was gnawing the end of his mustache, said, "I have already had the honor to beg you to set forth the grievances you have against me."

"Aloud?"

"Certainly, aloud."

"In that case I will speak."

"Speak, Monsieur," said D'Artagnan, bowing; "we are all listening to you."

"Well, Monsieur, it is not a question of an injury towards myself, but of one towards my father."

"That you have already stated."

"Yes; but there are certain subjects which are only approached with great hesitation."

"If that hesitation in your case really does exist, I entreat you to overcome it."

"Even if it refer to a disgraceful action?"

"Yes; in every and any case"

The witnesses of this scene had at first looked at one another with a good deal of uneasiness. They were reassured, however, when they saw that the face of D'Artagnan manifested no emotion whatever. De Wardes still kept silence. "Speak, Monsieur!" said the musketeer; "you see that you are keeping us waiting."

"Listen, then! My father loved a woman of noble birth, and this woman loved my father." D'Artagnan and Athos exchanged looks. De Wardes continued: "M. d'Artagnan intercepted some letters which indicated an assignation, substituted himself under a disguise for the person who was expected, and took advantage of the darkness."

"That is true," said D'Artagnan.

A slight murmur was heard from those present. "Yes, I was guilty of that dishonorable action. You should have added, Monsieur, since you are so impartial, that at the period when the circumstance with which you reproach me happened, I was not one-and-twenty years of age."

"The action is not the less shameful on that account," said De Wardes; "and it is quite sufficient for a gen-

tleman to have attained the age of reason, to avoid committing any act of indelicacy."

A renewed murmur was heard, but this time of astonishment and almost of doubt.

"It was a most shameful deception, I admit," said D'Artagnan, "and I have not waited for M. de Wardes's reproaches to reproach myself for it, and very bitterly too. Age has made me more reasonable, and above all more upright, and this injury has been atoned for by lasting regret. But I appeal to you, gentlemen; this affair took place in 1626, at a period happily for yourselves known to you by tradition only at a period when love was not over-scrupulous, when consciences did not distil, as in the present day, poison and bitterness. We were young soldiers, always fighting or being attacked, our swords always out of the scabbard or at least half drawn. Death then always stared us in the face, war hardened us, and the cardinal pressed us sorely. In short, I have repented of it; and more than that, — I still repent it, M. de Wardes."

"I can well understand that, Monsieur, for the action itself needed repentance; but you were not the less the cause of that lady's disgrace. She of whom you have been speaking, covered with shame, borne down by the affront she had received, fled, quitted France, and no one ever knew what became of her."

"Stay!" said the Comte de la Fère, stretching his hand towards De Wardes with a sinister smile; "you are mistaken. She was seen; and there are persons even now present who, having often heard her spoken of, will easily recognize her by the description I am about to give. She was about five-and-twenty years of age, slender in form, of a pale complexion, and fair-haired; she was married in England."

"Married?" exclaimed De Wardes.

"So you were not aware that she was married? You see we are far better informed than yourself, M. de Wardes. Do you happen to know that she was usually styled 'Milady,' without the addition of any name to that title?"

"Yes, I know that."

"Good heavens!" murmured Buckingham.

"Very well, Monsieur. That woman, who came from England, returned to England after having thrice attempted M. d'Artagnan's life. That was but just, you will say, since M. d'Artagnan had insulted her. But that which was not just was that this woman, when in England, by her seductions completely enslaved a young man in the service of Lord Winter, by the name of Felton. You change color, my Lord Buckingham, and your eyes kindle with anger and sorrow. Let your Grace finish the recital, then, and tell M. de Wardes who that woman was who placed the knife in the hand of your father's murderer."

A cry escaped from the lips of all present. The young duke passed his handkerchief across his forehead, which was covered with perspiration. A dead silence ensued among the spectators. "You see, M. de Wardes," said D'Artagnan, whom this recital had impressed more and more, as his own recollection revived while Athos was speaking, — "you see that my crime did not cause the destruction of a soul, and that the soul in question was altogether lost before my offence. It is, however, a matter of conscience on my part. Now that this matter is settled, therefore, it remains for me, M. de Wardes, to ask with the greatest humility your forgiveness for this shameless deed, as most certainly I should have asked it of your father if he were still alive, and if I had met him

after my return to France, subsequent to the death of King Charles I."

"That is too much, M. d'Artagnan," exclaimed many voices, with animation.

"No, gentlemen," said the captain. "And now, M. de Wardes, I hope that all is finished between us, and that you will have no further occasion to speak ill of me. Do you consider the matter cleared up?"

De Wardes bowed, stammering his excuses.

"I trust, also," said D'Artagnan, approaching the young man closely, "that you will no longer speak ill of any one, as you have the unpleasant habit of doing; for a man so puritanically conscientious as you are, who can reproach an old soldier for a youthful freak five-and-thirty years after it has happened, — you, I say, who advocate such purity of conscience, will undertake on your side to do nothing contrary either to conscience or to the principles of honor. And now listen attentively to what I am going to say, M. de Wardes, in conclusion. Take care that no tale with which your name may be associated reaches my ear!"

"Monsieur," said De Wardes, "it is useless threatening to no purpose."

"I have not yet finished, M. de Wardes," replied D'Artagnan, "and you must listen to me still further." The circle of listeners, full of eager curiosity, drew closer together. "You spoke just now of the honor of a woman and of the honor of your father. We were glad to hear you speak in that manner; for it is pleasing to think that such a sentiment of delicacy and rectitude, which did not exist, it seems, in our minds, lives in those of our children; and it is delightful, too, to see a young man at an age when men from habit become the destroyers of the honor of women respect and defend it."

De Wardes bit his lips and clinched his hands, evidently much disturbed to learn how this discourse, the beginning of which was announced in so threatening a manner, would terminate.

"How did it happen, then," continued D'Artagnan, "that you allowed yourself to say to M le Vicomte de Bragelonne that he did not know who his mother was?"

Raoul's eye flashed, as darting forward he exclaimed, "Monsieur the Chevalier, this is a personal affair of my own!" at which exclamation De Wardes smiled maliciously.

D'Artagnan put Raoul aside, saying, "Do not interrupt me, young man!" and looking at De Wardes in an authoritative manner, he continued: "I am now dealing with a matter which cannot be settled by means of the sword. I discuss it before men of honor, all of whom have more than once had their swords in their hands in affairs of honor. I selected them expressly. These gentlemen well know that every secret for which men fight ceases to be a secret. I again put my question to M de Wardes: What was the subject of conversation when you offended this young man in offending his father and mother at the same time?"

"It seems to me," returned De Wardes, "that liberty of speech is allowed when it is ready to be supported by every means which a man of courage has at his disposal."

"Ah, Monsieur, tell me what the means are by which a man of courage can sustain a slanderous expression."

"The sword."

"You fail in your argument, not only in logic, but in religion and honor. You expose the lives of many others, without referring to your own, which seems to be much exposed to danger. Besides, fashions pass away, Monsieur; and the fashion of duelling has passed away, with

out referring in any way to the edicts of his Majesty which forbid it. Therefore, in order to be consistent with your own chivalrous notions, you will at once apologize to M. Raoul de Bragelonne; you will tell him how much you regret having spoken so lightly, and that the nobility and purity of his race are inscribed not in his heart alone, but still more in every action of his life. You will do this, M. de Wardes, as I, an old officer, did it just now to your boy's mustache."

"And if I refuse?" inquired De Wardes.

"In that case the result will be —"

"That which you think you will prevent," said De Wardes, laughing, "the result will be that your plan of conciliation will end in a violation of the king's prohibition."

"Not so," said the captain, quietly; "you are quite mistaken."

"What will be the result, then?"

"The result will be that I shall go to the king, with whom I am on tolerably good terms, to whom I have been happy enough to render certain services dating from a period when you were not born, and who at my request has just sent me an order in blank for M. Baisemeaux de Montlezun, governor of the Bastille; and I shall say to the king, 'Sire, a man has in a cowardly manner insulted M. de Bragelonne, in the person of his mother; I have written this man's name upon the *lettre de cachet* which your Majesty has been kind enough to give me, so that M. de Wardes is in the Bastille for three years.'" And D'Artagnan, drawing from his pocket the order signed by the king, held it towards De Wardes; then, seeing that the young man was not quite convinced and received the warning as an idle threat, he shrugged his shoulders, and walked leisurely towards the table,

upon which lay a writing-case and a pen, the length of which would have appalled the topographer Porthos.

De Wardes then saw that nothing could well be more seriously intended than the threat in question, for the Bastille even at that period was already held in dread. He advanced a step towards Raoul, and in an almost unintelligible voice, said, "I offer my apologies in the terms which M. d'Artagnan just now dictated, and which I am forced to make to you."

"One moment, Monsieur," said the musketeer, with the greatest tranquillity; "you mistake the terms of the apology. I did not say, 'and which I am forced to make;' I said, 'and which my conscience induces me to make.' This latter expression, believe me, is better than the former; and it will be far preferable, since it will be the most truthful expression of your own sentiments."

"I subscribe to it, then," said De Wardes; "but really, gentlemen, you must admit that a sword-thrust through the body, as was the custom formerly, was far better than tyranny like this."

"No, Monsieur," replied Buckingham; "for the sword-thrust, when received, was no indication that a particular person was right or wrong, — it only showed that he was more or less skilful."

"Monsieur!" exclaimed De Wardes.

"There now," interrupted D'Artagnan, "you are going to say something very rude, and I am rendering you a service in stopping you in time."

"Is that all, Monsieur?" inquired De Wardes.

"Absolutely everything," replied D'Artagnan; "and these gentlemen, as well as myself, are quite satisfied with you."

"Believe me, Monsieur," rejoined De Wardes, "that your reconciliations are not successful."

"In what way?"

"Because, as we are now about to separate, I would wager that M. de Bragelonne and myself are greater enemies than ever."

"You are deceived, Monsieur, so far as I am concerned," returned Raoul; "for I do not retain the slightest animosity in my heart against you."

This last blow overwhelmed De Wardes; he cast his eyes around him like a man utterly bewildered. D'Artagnan saluted most courteously the gentlemen who had been present at the explanation, and every one, on leaving the room, shook hands with him; but not one hand was held out towards De Wardes. "Oh!" exclaimed the young man, abandoning himself to the rage which consumed him, "can I not find some one on whom to wreak my vengeance?"

"You can, Monsieur, for I am here!" whispered a voice full of menace in his ear.

De Wardes turned round, and saw the Duke of Buckingham, who having probably remained behind with that intention had just approached him. "You, Monsieur?" exclaimed De Wardes.

"Yes, I! I am no subject of the King of France; I am not going to remain on the territory, since I am about setting off for England. I have accumulated in my heart such a mass of despair and rage that I too, like yourself, need to revenge myself upon some one. I approve M. d'Artagnan's principles extremely, but I am not bound to apply them to you. I am an Englishman, and in my turn I propose to you what you proposed to others to no purpose. Since you, therefore, my dear M. de Wardes, are so terribly incensed, take me for an object of attack. In thirty-four hours' time I shall be at Calais. Come with me; the journey will appear shorter with company

than if taken alone. We will draw our swords when we get there, upon the sands which are covered by the rising tide, and which form part of the French territory during six hours of the daytime, but belong to the territory of Heaven during the other six."

"Very well," replied De Wardes, "I accept."

"I assure you," said the duke, "that if you kill me you will be rendering me an infinite service."

"I will do my utmost to be agreeable to you, Duke," said De Wardes

"It is agreed, then, that I carry you off with me?"

"I shall be at your commands I require some real danger and some mortal risk to tranquillize me!"

"In that case I think you have met with what you are looking for. Farewell, M. de Wardes; to-morrow morning my valet will tell you the exact hour of departure. We will travel together like two excellent friends. I generally travel as fast as I can Adieu!"

Buckingham saluted De Wardes, and returned to the king's apartments. De Wardes, irritated beyond measure, left the Palais Royal, and hurried through the streets homeward to the house where he lodged.

CHAPTER XXV.

BAISEMEAUX DE MONTLEZUN.

After the rather severe lesson administered to De Wardes, Athos and D'Artagnan together descended the staircase which led to the courtyard of the Palais-Royal.

"You perceive," said Athos to D'Artagnan, "that Raoul cannot, sooner or later, avoid a duel with De Wardes; for De Wardes is as brave as he is vicious and wicked."

"I know these fellows well," replied D'Artagnan; "I have had an affair with the father. I assure you that although at that time I had good muscles and a sort of brute courage, — I assure you that the father did me some mischief. But you should have seen how I fought it out with him, — ah, my friend, such encounters never take place in these times! I had a hand which could never remain at rest, — a hand like quicksilver; you knew its quality, Athos, for you have seen me at work. My sword was no longer a piece of steel; it was a serpent which assumed every form and every length, seeking where it might thrust its head, — in other words, where it might fix its bite. I advanced half-a-dozen feet, then three, and then body to body. I pressed my antagonist closely; then I darted back again ten feet. No human power could resist that ferocious ardor. Well, De Wardes, the father, with the bravery of his race, with his dogged courage, kept me busy a long time; and my fingers at the end of the engagement were, I well remember, tired enough."

"It is, then, as I said," resumed Athos: "the son will always be looking out for Raoul, and will end by meeting him; and Raoul can easily be found when he is sought for."

"Agreed. But Raoul calculates well; he bears no grudge against De Wardes,— he has said so; he will wait until he is provoked, and in that case his position is a good one. The king cannot take offence, besides, we shall know how to pacify his Majesty. But why are you so full of these fears and anxieties? You are not easily alarmed."

"I will tell you what makes me anxious. Raoul is to see the king to-morrow, when his Majesty will inform him of his wishes respecting a certain marriage. Raoul, loving as he does, will get out of temper; and once in an angry mood, if he were to meet De Wardes, the shell would explode."

"We will prevent the explosion, my friend."

"Not I," said Athos, "for I must return to Blois. All this gilded elegance of the court, all these intrigues, disgust me. I am no longer a young man who can accustom himself to the meannesses of the present day. I have read in the great Book of God many things too beautiful and too great to take any interest in the trifling phrases which these men whisper among themselves when they wish to deceive others. In a word, I am sick of Paris wherever and whenever you are not with me; and as I cannot have you always, I wish to return to Blois."

"How wrong you are, Athos, — how you gainsay your origin and the destiny of your nature! Men of your stamp are created to continue to the very last moment in full possession of their faculties. Look at my old sword, a Spanish blade, the one I wore at Rochelle; it served

me for thirty years without fail. One day in the winter it fell upon the marble floor of the Louvre and broke off short. I had a hunting-knife made of it which will last a hundred years yet. You, Athos, with your loyalty, your frankness, your cool courage, and your sound information, are the very man kings need to warn and direct them. Remain here; M. Fouquet will not last so long as my Spanish blade."

"Is it possible," said Athos, smilingly, "that my friend D'Artagnan, after having raised me to the skies, making me an object of worship, casts me down from the top of Olympus, and hurls me to the ground? I have a more exalted ambition, D'Artagnan. To be a minister, to be a slave, never! Am I not still greater? I am nothing. I remember having heard you occasionally call me 'the great Athos;' I defy you, therefore, if I were minister, to continue to bestow that title upon me. No, no: I do not yield myself in this manner."

"We will not speak of it any more, then, renounce everything, even the brotherly feeling which unites us."

"Oh, my dear friend, what you say is almost cruel!"

D'Artagnan pressed Athos's hand warmly. "No, no: renounce everything without fear. Raoul can get on without you; I am at Paris."

"Well, then, I shall return to Blois. We will take leave of each other to-night; to-morrow at daybreak I shall be on my horse again."

"You cannot return to your hotel alone; why did you not bring Grimaud with you?"

"Grimaud is asleep; he goes to bed early, for my poor old servant gets easily fatigued. He came from Blois with me, and I compelled him to remain within doors; but if it were necessary to retrace the forty leagues which separate us from Blois without taking breath, he

would die in the attempt without a murmur. But I don't wish to lose Grimaud."

"You shall have one of my musketeers to carry a torch for you. Holloa! some one there," called out D'Artagnan, leaning over the gilded balustrade, — the heads of seven or eight musketeers appeared, — "I wish some gentleman who is so disposed to escort the Comte de la Fère," cried D'Artagnan.

"Thank you for your readiness gentlemen," said Athos; "I regret to have occasion to trouble you in this manner."

"I would willingly escort the Comte de la Fère," said some one, "if I had not to speak to M. d'Artagnan."

"Who is that?" said D'Artagnan, looking into the darkness.

"I, M. d'Artagnan."

"Heaven forgive me, if that is not M. Baisemeaux's voice!"

"It is, Monsieur."

"What are you doing there in the courtyard, my dear Baisemeaux?"

"I am waiting your orders, my dear M. d'Artagnan."

"Wretch that I am!" said D'Artagnan; "true, you have been told, I suppose, that some one was to be arrested, and have come yourself, instead of sending an officer?"

"I came because I had occasion to speak to you."

"You did not send to me?"

"I waited until you were disengaged," said M. Baisemeaux, timidly.

"I must leave you, D'Artagnan," said Athos to his friend.

"Not before I have presented M. Baisemeaux de Montlezun, the governor of the Bastille."

Baisemeaux and Athos saluted each other.

"Surely you must know each other," added D'Artagnan.

"I have an indistinct recollection of M. Baisemeaux," said Athos.

"My dear friend, you remember Baisemeaux, that king's guardsman with whom we used formerly to have such delightful meetings in the cardinal's time."

"Perfectly," said Athos, taking leave of him with affability.

"M. le Comte de la Fère, whose *nom de guerre* was Athos," whispered D'Artagnan to Baisemeaux.

"Yes, yes; a brave man, one of the famous four."

"Precisely so. But, my dear Baisemeaux, shall we talk now?"

"If you please."

"In the first place, as for the orders, there are none. The king has decided not to arrest the person in question."

"So much the worse," said Baisemeaux, with a sigh.

"What do you mean by 'so much the worse'?" exclaimed D'Artagnan, laughing.

"No doubt of it," returned the governor of the Bastille; "my prisoners are my income."

"I beg your pardon, I did not see it in that light."

"And so there are no orders," repeated Baisemeaux, with a sigh. "What an admirable situation yours is, Captain," he continued, after a pause, — "captain-lieutenant of the Musketeers!"

"Oh, it is good enough; but I don't see why you should envy me, — you, governor of the Bastille, the first castle in France."

"I am well aware of that," said Baisemeaux, in a sorrowful tone of voice.

"You say that like a man confessing his sins. I would willingly exchange my profits for yours."

"Don't speak of profits to me, if you wish to save me the bitterest anguish."

"Why do you look first on one side and then on the other, as if you were afraid of being arrested yourself, — you whose business it is to arrest and guard others?"

"I was looking to see whether any one could see or listen to us; it would be safer to confer more in private, if you would grant me such a favor."

"Baisemeaux, you seem to forget that we are acquaintances of five-and-thirty years' standing. Don't assume such sanctified airs; make yourself quite comfortable! I don't eat governors of the Bastille raw."

"Heaven be praised!"

"Come into the courtyard with me; it's a beautiful moonlight night. We will walk up and down, arm in arm, under the trees, while you tell me your mournful tale. Come!" He drew the doleful governor into the courtyard, took him by the arm as he had said, and in his rough, good-humored way, cried: "Out with it! rattle away, Baisemeaux! what have you got to say?"

"It 's a long story."

"You prefer your own lamentations, then; my opinion is, it will be longer than ever. I'll wager you are making fifty thousand livres out of your pigeons in the Bastille."

"Would to Heaven that were so, M. d'Artagnan!"

"You surprise me, Baisemeaux. Just look at yourself; you are the picture of melancholy. I should like to lead you before a glass, and you would see how plump and florid-looking you are, as fat and round as a cheese, with eyes like lighted coals; and if it were not for that ugly wrinkle you try to cultivate on your forehead, you would look hardly fifty years old, and you are sixty, if I am not mistaken."

"All quite true."

"Of course I knew it was true, as true as the fifty thousand livres' profit you make." At this remark Baisemeaux stamped his foot.

"There, there," said D'Artagnan, "I will run up your account for you: you were captain of M. de Mazarin's Guards, — twelve thousand livres a year; you received that for twelve years, — total, one hundred and forty-four thousand livres."

"Twelve thousand livres! Are you mad?" cried Baisemeaux; "the old miser gave me no more than six thousand, and the expenses of the post amounted to sixty-five hundred. M. Colbert, who deducted the other six thousand livres, condescended to allow me to take fifty pistoles as a gratification; so that, if it were not for my little estate at Montlezun, which brings me in twelve thousand livres a year, I could not have met my obligations."

"I will not insist on your convicting yourself; but how about the fifty thousand livres from the Bastille? There, I trust, you are boarded and lodged, and get your six thousand livres' salary."

"Admitted!"

"Whether the year be good or bad, there are fifty prisoners, who on an average bring you in a thousand livres a year each."

"I don't deny it."

"Well, there is an income of fifty thousand livres; you have held the post three years, and must have received in that time one hundred and fifty thousand livres."

"You forget one circumstance, dear M. d'Artagnan."

"What is that?"

"That while you received your appointment as captain from the king's hands, I received mine as governor from Messieurs Tremblay and Louvière."

"Quite right; and Tremblay was not a man to let you have the post for nothing."

"Nor was Louvière, either; the result was that I gave seventy-five thousand livres to Tremblay as his share."

"Very agreeable that! and to Louvière?"

"The same."

"Money down?"

"No; that would have been impossible. The king did not wish, or rather M. de Mazarin did not wish, to have the appearance of removing those two precious sports, sprung from the barricades, he permitted them, therefore, to make certain extravagant conditions for their retirement."

"What were those conditions?"

"Frightful! — three years' income as a bonus."

"The deuce! so that the one hundred and fifty thousand livres have passed into their hands."

"Precisely so."

"And beyond that?"

"A sum of one hundred and fifty thousand crowns, or fifteen thousand pistoles, whichever you please, in three payments."

"Exorbitant enough."

"Yes; but that is not all."

"What besides?"

"In default of the fulfilment by me of any one of those conditions, those gentlemen enter upon their functions again. The king has been induced to sign that."

"It is enormous, incredible!"

"Such is the fact, however."

"I do indeed pity you, my poor Baisemeaux! But why, in the name of fortune, did M. de Mazarin grant you this pretended favor? It would have been more simple to refuse you altogether."

"Certainly, but he was forced to do so by my patron."

"Your patron! Who is that?"

"One of your own friends, indeed; M. d'Herblay."

"M. d'Herblay! Aramis!"

"Just so; he has been very kind to me."

"Kind! to make you enter into such a bargain!"

"Listen! I wished to leave the cardinal's service. M. d'Herblay spoke on my behalf to Louvière and Tremblay; they objected. I wished to have the appointment very much, for I knew what it could be made to produce; in my distress I confided in M. d'Herblay, and he offered to become my surety for each payment."

"Aramis? You astound me! Aramis become your surety?"

"Like a man of honor. He procured the signature · Tremblay and Louvière resigned their appointments. I have to pay every year twenty-five thousand livres to one of those two gentlemen; every year, too, in May, M. d'Herblay himself comes to the Bastille, and brings me twenty-five hundred pistoles to distribute to my crocodiles."

"You owe Aramis one hundred and fifty thousand livres, then?"

"Alas, that is why I am in despair, for I owe him only one hundred thousand."

"I don't quite understand you."

"He has come only two years. To-day, however, is the thirty-first of May, and he has not come yet, and to-morrow, at midday, the payment falls due; if therefore I don't pay to-morrow, those gentlemen can, by the terms of the contract, break off the bargain. I shall be stripped of everything; I shall have worked for three years, and given two hundred and fifty thousand livres for nothing, absolutely for nothing at all, dear M. d'Artagnan."

"This is very strange," murmured D'Artagnan.

"You can now imagine that I may well have wrinkles on my forehead, can you not?"

"Yes, indeed!"

"And you can imagine, too, that notwithstanding I may be as round as a cheese, with a complexion like an apple, and my eyes like coals on fire, I may almost be afraid that I shall not have a cheese or an apple left me to eat, and that I shall have only my eyes left me to weep with."

"This is disheartening."

"I have come to you, M. d'Artagnan, for you are the only one who can get me out of my trouble."

"In what way?"

"You are acquainted with the Abbé d'Herblay, and you know that he is somewhat mysterious."

"Yes, yes."

"Well, you can perhaps give me the address of his presbytery; for I have been to Noisy-le-Sec, and he is no longer there."

"I should think not, indeed. He is bishop of Vannes."

"What! Vannes in Bretagne?"

"Yes."

The little man began to tear his hair, saying, "How can I get to Vannes from here by midday to-morrow? I am a lost man."

"Your despair quite distresses me."

"Vannes, Vannes!" cried Baisemeaux.

"But, listen! A bishop is not always a resident. M. d'Herblay may possibly not be so far away as you fear."

"Oh, tell me his address!"

"I really don't know it, my friend."

"In that case I am utterly lost. I will go and throw myself at the king's feet."

"But, Baisemeaux, you astonish me; why, since the

Bastille is capable of producing fifty thousand livres a year, have you not tried to screw one hundred thousand out of it?"

"Because I am an honest man, M. d'Artagnan, and because my prisoners are fed like potentates."

"Well, you are in a fair way to get out of your difficulties, give yourself a good attack of indigestion with your high living, and die of a surfeit between now and midday to-morrow."

"How can you be cruel enough to laugh?"

"Nay, you really distress me. Come, Baisemeaux, if you can pledge me your word of honor, do so, that you will not open your lips to any one about what I am going to say to you.

"Never, never!"

"You wish to put your hand on Aramis?"

"At any cost."

"Well, go and find M. Fouquet."

"What connection—"

"Nimny that you are! Don't you know that Vannes is in the diocese of Belle-Isle, or that Belle-Isle is in the diocese of Vannes? Belle-Isle belongs to M. Fouquet, and M. Fouquet nominated M. d'Herblay to that bishopric."

"I see, I see; you restore me to life again."

"So much the better. Now go and tell M. Fouquet very simply that you wish to speak to M. d'Herblay."

"Of course, of course," said Baisemeaux, eagerly.

"But," said D'Artagnan, checking him by a severe look, "your word of honor?"

"My sacred word of honor," replied the little man, about to set off running.

"Where are you going?"

"To M. Fouquet's house."

"Don't do that; M. Fouquet is playing at cards with the king. All you can do is to pay M. Fouquet a visit early to-morrow morning."

"I will do so. Thank you."

"Good luck attend you!" said D'Artagnan.

"Thank you."

"This is a strange affair," murmured D'Artagnan, as he slowly ascended the staircase after he had left Baisemeaux. "What possible interest can Aramis have in obliging Baisemeaux in this manner? Well, I suppose we shall learn some day or other."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE KING'S CARD TABLE.

Fouquet was present, as D'Artagnan had said, at the king's card-table. It seemed as if Buckingham's departure had shed a balm upon all the ulcerated hearts of the previous evening. Monsieur, radiant with delight, made a thousand affectionate signs to his mother. The Comte de Guiche could not separate himself from Buckingham, and while playing conversed with him upon the circumstances of his projected voyage. Buckingham, thoughtful and kind, like a man who has adopted a resolution, listened to the count, and from time to time cast a look full of regret and hopeless love at Madame, who in her elation of spirits divided her attention between the king, who was playing with her, Monsieur, who quietly joked her about her enormous winnings, and De Guiche, who exhibited an extravagant delight. Of Buckingham she took but little notice; for her, this fugitive, this exile, was now simply a remembrance, and no longer a man.

Light hearts are thus constituted; while they themselves continue untouched, they roughly break off with every one who may possibly interfere with their little plans of selfish comfort. Madame had received Buckingham's smiles and attentions and sighs while he was present; but what was the good of sighing, smiling, and kneeling at a distance? Can one tell in what direction the winds in the channel, which toss the mighty vessels

to and fro, carry such sighs as these? The duke could not help noticing this change, and his heart was cruelly hurt by it. Of a sensitive character, proud, and susceptible of deep attachment, he cursed the day on which the passion had entered his heart. The glances which he bestowed upon Madame became colder as his thoughts grew cold. He could hardly yet rise above his trouble, but he was strong enough to impose silence upon the tumultuous outcries of his heart. In exact proportion, however, as Madame suspected this change of feeling, she increased her activity to regain the light which she was about to lose; her wit, timid and wavering at first, was displayed in brilliant flashes; at any cost, she felt that she must be observed above everything and every one, even above the king himself. And she was so; for the queens, notwithstanding their dignity, and the king, despite the respect which etiquette required, were all eclipsed by her. The queens, stately and ceremonious, were softened from the very first, and could not restrain their laughter. Madame Henrietta, the queen-mother, was dazzled by the brilliancy which cast distinction upon her family, thanks to the wit of the granddaughter of Henry IV. The king so jealous, as a young man and as a monarch, of the superiority of all those who surrounded him, could not help admitting himself vanquished by that petulance which was so thoroughly French in its nature, and whose energy was more than ever increased by its English humor. Like a child, he was captivated by her radiant beauty, which her wit enhanced. Madame's eyes flashed like lightning. Mirth escaped from her ruby lips, like persuasion from the lips of Nestor of old. The whole court, submissive to her enchanting grace, noticed for the first time that laughter could be indulged in before the greatest monarch in the world by the people

worthy to be called the wittiest and most polished in the world.

Madame from that evening enjoyed a success capable of bewildering any one who had not been born in those elevated regions which surround a throne, and which in spite of their elevation are proof against such giddiness. From that very moment Louis XIV. acknowledged Madame as an important personage. Buckingham regarded her as a coquette deserving the cruellest tortures, De Guiche looked upon her as a divinity, and the courtiers as a star whose light might become the focus of all favor and power. And yet Louis XIV., a few years before, had not even condescended to offer his hand to that "ugly creature" for a ballet; and Buckingham had worshipped this coquette on his knees, while De Guiche had looked upon this divinity as a mere woman; and the courtiers had not dared to extol this star in her upward progress, fearful to displease the monarch whom this star had formerly displeased.

Let us see what was taking place during this memorable evening at the king's card-table. The young queen, although Spanish by birth and the niece of Anne of Austria, loved the king and could not conceal her affection. Anne of Austria, a keen observer like all women, and imperious like every queen, was sensible of Madame's power, and bowed before it immediately, -- a circumstance which induced the young queen to leave the room and retire to her apartments. The king paid hardly any attention to her departure, notwithstanding the pretended symptoms of indisposition by which it was accompanied. Fortified by the rules of etiquette which he had begun to introduce at the court, as an element of every position and relation of life, Louis XIV. did not disturb himself; he offered his hand to Madame without looking at Monsieur his brother,

and led the young princess to the door of her apartments. It was remarked that at the threshold of the door his Majesty, freed from every restraint, or not strong enough for the situation, let a deep sigh escape him. The ladies present — for nothing escapes a woman's observation, Mademoiselle de Montalais's for instance — did not fail to say to one another, "The king sighed;" and "Madame sighed too." This had been indeed the case. Madame had sighed very noiselessly, but with an accompaniment much more dangerous to the king's repose. Madame had sighed, closing her beautiful black eyes, then, opening them, laden as they were with an indescribable melancholy, she had raised them to the king, whose face at that moment had visibly heightened in color. The consequence of these blushes, of these interchanged sighs, and of this royal agitation was that Montalais committed an indiscretion, which certainly affected her companion; for Mademoiselle de la Vallière, less clear-sighted perhaps, turned pale when the king blushed, and, her attendance being required upon Madame, she tremblingly followed the princess, without thinking to take the gloves, which court etiquette required her to do. True it is that this young country-girl might allege as an excuse the agitation into which the king threw her; for Mademoiselle de la Vallière, busily engaged in closing the door, had involuntarily fixed her eyes upon the king, who, as he retired backward, had his face towards it.

The king returned to the card-room. He tried to speak to the different persons there, but it could easily be seen that his mind was absent. He jumbled different scores together, which was taken advantage of by some of the noblemen who had retained that habit since the time of M. de Mazarin, — the habit of exercising bad memory and good calculation. In this way Manicamp, absent-

minded as he was, — for M. Manicamp was the most honest man in the world, believe me, dear reader, — innocently appropriated twenty thousand livres, which were littering the table, and which did not seem legitimately to belong to any person in particular. In the same way M. de Wardes, whose head was doubtless a little bewildered by the occurrences of the evening, left to the Duke of Buckingham sixty double louis which he had won, which the duke, incapable, like his father, of soiling his hands with coin of any sort, had left to the candelabra, which could not protect their property.

The king regained his presence of mind in some degree when M. Colbert, who had been narrowly observant for some minutes, approached, and with great respect indeed, but with much urgency, whispered a word of some sort in the still confused hearing of his Majesty. Louis, at the suggestion, listened with renewed attention, and immediately looking around him, said, "Is M. Fouquet no longer here?"

"Yes, Sire, I am here," replied the voice of the superintendent, who was engaged with Buckingham; and he approached the king, who advanced a step towards him with a smiling yet unceremonious air.

"Forgive me," said Louis, "if I interrupt your conversation; but I claim your attention whenever I may require your services."

"I am always at the king's service," replied Fouquet.

"And your cash-box too," said the king, laughing with a false smile.

"My cash-box more than anything else," said Fouquet, coldly.

"The fact is, Monsieur, I wish to give a *fête* at Fontainebleau, — to keep open house for a fortnight; and I shall require — " He stopped, glancing at Colbert.

Fouquet waited without showing discomposure; and the king resumed, answering Colbert's cruel smile — "four million livres."

"Four million?" repeated Fouquet, bowing profoundly. The nails of the hand which was thrust in his bosom made bleeding furrows in his flesh, but the tranquil expression of his face remained unaltered. "When will they be required, Sire?"

"Take your time, — I mean — no, no, as soon as possible."

"A certain time will be necessary, Sire."

"Time!" exclaimed Colbert, triumphantly

"The time, Monsieur," said the superintendent, with the haughtiest disdain, "simply to count the money, a million only can be drawn and weighed in a day."

"Four days, then," said Colbert.

"My clerks," replied Fouquet, addressing himself to the king, "will perform wonders for his Majesty's service, and the sum shall be ready in three days."

It was for Colbert now to turn pale. Louis looked at him astonished. Fouquet withdrew without any parade or weakness, smiling at his numerous friends, in whose countenances alone he read the sincerity of their friendship, — an interest partaking of compassion. Fouquet, however, should not be judged by his smile, for in reality he felt as if he had been stricken by death. Drops of blood beneath his coat stained the fine linen which covered his chest. His dress concealed the blood, and his smile the rage which devoured him. His domestics perceived, by the manner in which he approached his carriage, that their master was not in the best humor; the result of their discernment was that his orders were executed with that exactitude of manœuvre which is found on board a man-of-war commanded during a storm

by a passionate captain. The carriage, therefore, did not simply roll along, — it flew.

Fouquet had hardly time to recover himself during the drive; on his arrival he went at once to Aramis, who had not yet retired for the night. As for Porthos, he had supped very agreeably from a roast leg of mutton, two pheasants, and a mountain of crawfish; he had then had his body anointed with perfumed oils, in the manner of the wrestlers of old, and when the anointment was completed, he was wrapped in flannels and placed in a warm bed. Aramis, as we have already said, had not retired. Seated at his ease in a velvet dressing gown, he wrote letter after letter in his fine and hurried handwriting, a page of which contained a quarter of a volume.

The door was thrown hurriedly open, and the superintendent appeared, pale, agitated, and care-worn. Aramis looked up. "Good evening," said he, and his searching look detected his host's sadness and disordered state of mind. "Was the play good at his Majesty's?" asked Aramis, by way of beginning the conversation.

Fouquet threw himself upon a couch, and with a gesture showed the door to the servant who had followed him; then when the servant had left, he said, "Excellent."

Aramis, who had followed every movement with his eyes, noticed that he stretched himself upon the cushions with a sort of feverish impatience. "You have lost, as usual?" inquired Aramis, his pen still in his hand.

"More than usual," replied Fouquet.

"You know how to support losses."

"Sometimes."

"What! M. Fouquet a bad player!"

"There is play and play, M. d'Herblay."

"How much have you lost?" inquired Aramis, with a slight uneasiness.

Fouquet collected himself a moment, to regain his usual command of his voice, and then, without the slightest emotion, said, "The evening has cost me four millions;" and a bitter laugh drowned the last vibration of these words.

Aramis, who did not expect such an amount, dropped his pen. "Four millions!" said he; "you have lost four millions, — impossible!"

"M. Colbert held my cards for me," replied the superintendent, with the same bitter laugh.

"Ah, now I understand; so, so, a new application for funds?"

"Yes, my friend, and from the king's own lips. It is impossible to destroy a man with a more charming smile. What do you think of it?"

"It is clear that your ruin is the object in view."

"So that is still your opinion?"

"Yes. Besides, there is nothing in it which should astonish you, for we have foreseen it all along."

"Yes; but I did not expect four millions."

"No doubt the amount is serious, but after all, four millions are not quite the death of a man, especially when the man in question is M. Fouquet."

"My dear D'Herblay, if you knew the contents of my coffers you would be less easy."

"And you promised?"

"What else could I do?"

"That 's true."

"The very day when I refuse, Colbert will procure it; whence I know not, but he will procure the money, and I shall be lost."

"There is no doubt of that. In how many days hence have you promised these four millions?"

"In three days; the king seemed exceedingly pressed."

"In three days?"

"Oh, my friend," resumed Fouquet, "when I think that just now, as I passed along the streets, the people cried out, 'There is the rich M. Fouquet,' it is enough to turn my brain."

"Stay, Monsieur! the matter is not worth so much trouble," said Aramis, calmly, sprinkling some sand over the letter he had just written.

"Suggest a remedy, then, for this evil without a remedy."

"There is only one remedy for you, — pay."

"But it is very uncertain whether I have the money. Everything must be exhausted: Belle-Isle is paid for; the pension has been paid, and money, since the investigation of the accounts of those who farm the revenue, is scarce. Besides, admitting that I pay this time, how can I do so on another occasion? For be very sure that we are not through with it all. When kings have tasted money, they are like tigers who have tasted flesh, — they devour everything. The day will come when I shall have to say, 'Impossible, Sire,' and on that very day I am a lost man."

Aramis raised his shoulders slightly, saying, "A man in your position, my Lord, is only lost when he wishes to be so."

"A man, whatever his position may be, cannot hope to struggle against a king."

"Nonsense; when I was young I struggled successfully with the Cardinal Richelieu, who was King of France, — nay more, cardinal."

"Where are my armies, my troops, my treasures? I have not even Belle-Isle."

"Bah! necessity is the mother of invention; and when you think all is lost, something unexpected will be discovered which shall save everything."

"Who will discover this marvellous something?"

"Yourself."

"I! I resign my office of inventor."

"Then I will."

"Be it so. But then, set to work without delay."

"Oh, we have time enough!"

"You are killing me, D'Herblay, with your calmness," said the superintendent, passing his handkerchief over his brow.

"Do you not remember that I once told you never to make yourself uneasy, if you possess but courage. Have you any?"

"I believe so."

"Then don't make yourself uneasy."

"It is decided, then, that at the last moment you will come to my assistance."

"It will only be the repayment of a debt I owe you, Monseigneur."

"It is the vocation of financiers to anticipate the wants of men such as yourself, D'Herblay."

"If obligingness is the vocation of financiers, charity is a virtue of the clergy. Only, on this occasion do you act, Monsieur. You are not yet sufficiently reduced, and at the last moment we shall see what is to be done"

"We shall see, then, in a very short time."

"Very well. Now, permit me to tell you that, personally, I regret exceedingly that you are at present so short of money, because I was myself about to ask you for some."

"For yourself?"

"For myself or some of my people, — for mine or for ours."

"How much do you want?"

"Be easy on that score, — a roundish sum, it is true, but not too exorbitant."

"Tell me the amount."

"Fifty thousand livres."

"Oh, a mere nothing! Of course one has always fifty thousand livres. Why the deuce cannot that knave Colbert be as easily satisfied as you are? I should give myself far less trouble than I do. When do you need this sum?"

"To-morrow morning; but you require to know its destination?"

"Nay, nay, Chevalier, I need no explanation."

"You must have one. to-morrow is the 1st of June."

"Well?"

"One of our bonds becomes due."

"I did not know we had any bonds"

"Certainly; to-morrow we pay our last third."

"What third?"

"Of the one hundred and fifty thousand livres to Basemeaux"

"Baisemeaux, — who is he?"

"The governor of the Bastille."

"Ah! yes, I remember, but on what grounds am I to pay one hundred and fifty thousand livres to that man?"

"On account of the appointment which he, or rather we, purchased from Louvière and Tremblay."

"My recollection of the whole matter is very vague."

"That is likely enough, for you have so many affairs to attend to; however, I do not believe you have any affair of greater importance than this one."

"Tell me, then, why we purchased this appointment."

"Why, in order to render him a service, in the first place, and afterwards ourselves."

"Ourselves? You are joking."

"Monseigneur, the time may come when the governor of the Bastille may prove a very excellent acquaintance."

"I have not the good fortune to understand you, D'Herblay."

"Monseigneur, we have our own poets, our own engineer, our own architect, our own musicians, our own printer, and our own painters; we might need our own governor of the Bastille."

"Do you think so?"

"Let us not deceive ourselves, Monseigneur, we are very liable to pay the Bastille a visit, my dear M. Fouquet," added the prelate, displaying beneath his pale lips teeth which were still the same beautiful teeth so admired thirty years before by Marie Michon.

"And you think it is not too much to pay one hundred and fifty thousand livres for that, D'Herblay? I assure you that you generally invest your money better."

"The day will come when you will admit your mistake."

"My dear D'Herblay, the very day on which a man enters the Bastille, he is no longer protected by the past."

"Yes, he is, if the bonds are perfectly regular, besides, that good fellow Baisemeaux has not a courtier's heart. I am certain, my Lord, that he will not remain ungrateful for that money, without taking into account, I repeat, that I retain the acknowledgments."

"What a bedevilled affair, — usury in a matter of benevolence!"

"Do not mix yourself up with it, Monseigneur; if there be usury, it is I who practise it, and both of us profit by it, — that is all."

"Some intrigue, D'Herblay?"

"I do not deny it."

"And Baisemeaux an accomplice in it?"

"Why not? there are worse accomplices than he. May I depend, then, upon the five thousand pistoles to-morrow?"

"Do you want them this evening?"

"It would be better, for I wish to start early; poor Baisemeaux will not be able to imagine what has become of me, and must be upon thorns."

"You shall have the amount in an hour. Ah, D'Herblay, the interest of your one hundred and fifty thousand livres will never pay my four millions for me!" said Fouquet, rising.

"Why not, Monseigneur?"

"Good-night; I have business with my clerks before I retire."

"A good night's rest, Monseigneur."

"D'Herblay, you wish me what is impossible."

"Shall I have my fifty thousand livres this evening?"

"Yes."

"Go to sleep, then, in perfect safety; it is I who tell you to do so. Good-night, Monseigneur!"

Notwithstanding this assurance, and the tone in which it was given, Fouquet left the room shaking his head and heaving a sigh.

CHAPTER XXVII.

M. BAISEMEAUX DE MONTLEZUN'S LITTLE ACCOUNTS.

THE clock of St. Paul's was striking seven as Aramis, on horseback, dressed as a simple citizen, — that is to say, in a colored suit, with no distinctive mark about him except a kind of hunting knife by his side, — passed before the Rue du Petit-Muse, and stopped opposite the Rue des Tournelles, at the gate of the Bastille. Two sentries were on duty at the gate; they raised no difficulty about admitting Aramis, who entered without dismounting, and they pointed out the way he was to go by a long passage with buildings on both sides. This passage led to the drawbridge, or, in other words, to the real entrance. The drawbridge was down, and the duty of the day was about to begin. The sentinel at the outer guard-house stopped Aramis's further progress, asking him, in a rough tone of voice, what had brought him there. Aramis explained with his usual politeness that a wish to speak to M. Baisemeaux de Montlezun had occasioned his visit. The first sentinel then summoned a second sentinel, stationed within an inner lodge, who showed his face at the grating, and inspected the new arrival very attentively. Aramis reiterated the expression of his wish to see the governor, whereupon the sentinel called to an officer of lower grade, who was walking about in a tolerably spacious courtyard, and who in his turn, on being informed of his object, ran to seek one of the officers of the governor's staff. The latter, after having listened to Aramis's

request, begged him to wait a moment, then went away a short distance, but returned to ask his name.

"I cannot tell it to you, Monsieur," said Aramis; "but be assured that I have matters of such importance to communicate to the governor that I can only guarantee that M. de Baisemeaux will be delighted to see me; nay, more than that, when you shall have told him that it is the person whom he expected on the 1st of June, I am convinced that he will hasten here himself."

The officer could not be made to believe that a man of the governor's station should put himself out for a man of so little importance as the bourgeois-looking person on horseback appeared to be. "It happens most fortunately, Monsieur," he said, "that Monsieur the Governor is just getting ready to go out, and you can perceive his carriage with the horses already harnessed in the government courtyard; there will be no occasion for him to come to meet you, as he will see you as he passes by."

Aramis bowed to signify his assent; he did not wish to inspire others with too exalted an opinion of himself, and therefore waited patiently and in silence, leaning upon the saddle-bow of his horse. Ten minutes had hardly elapsed when the governor's carriage was observed to move. The governor appeared at the door, and got into the carriage, which immediately prepared to start. The same ceremony was observed for the governor himself as for a suspected stranger: the sentinel at the lodge advanced as the carriage was about to pass under the arch, and the governor opened the carriage-door, himself setting the example of obedience to orders; so that in this way the sentinel could convince himself that no one was smuggled out of the Bastille.

The carriage rolled along under the archway; but at

the moment when the iron gate was opened, the officer approached the carriage, which had stopped for the second time, and spoke a few words to the governor, who immediately put his head out of the window, and perceived Aramis on horseback at the end of the drawbridge. He straightway uttered almost a shout of delight, and got out, or rather darted out, of his carriage, running towards Aramis, whose hands he seized, making a thousand apologies. He came very near kissing him.

"What a difficult matter to enter the Bastille, Monsieur the Governor!" said Aramis. "Is it the same for those who are sent here against their wills as for those who come of their own accord?"

"A thousand pardons, Monseigneur! How delighted I am to see your Grace!"

"Hush! What are you thinking of, my dear M. de Baisemeaux? What do you suppose would be thought of a bishop in my present costume?"

"Pray excuse me, I had forgotten Take this gentleman's horse to the stables," cried Baisemeaux

"No, no," said Aramis; "I have five thousand pistoles in the portmanteau."

The governor's countenance became so radiant that if the prisoners had seen him they would have imagined some prince of the blood had arrived. "Yes, you are right; the horse shall be taken to the government house. Will you get into the carriage, my dear M. d'Herblay, and it shall take us back to my house."

"Get into a carriage to cross a courtyard, Monsieur the Governor! Do you believe that I am so great an invalid? No, no; we will go on foot."

Baisemeaux then offered his arm as a support, but the prelate did not accept it. They arrived in this manner at the government house, Baisemeaux rubbing his hands

and glancing at the horse from time to time, while Aramis was looking at the bare and black walls. A tolerably handsome vestibule, a straight staircase of white stone, led to the governor's apartments. Baisemeaux crossed the antechamber, the dining-room, where breakfast was being prepared, opened a small private door, and closeted himself with his guest in a large cabinet, the windows of which opened obliquely upon the courtyard and the stables. He installed the prelate with that obsequious politeness of which a good man or a grateful man alone possesses the secret. An arm-chair, a footstool, a small table beside him on which to rest his hand, — everything was prepared by the governor himself. With his own hands, too, he placed upon the table, with an almost religious solicitude, the bag containing the gold, which one of the soldiers had brought up with as much reverence as that with which a priest bears the holy sacrament. The soldier having left the room, Baisemeaux himself closed the door after him, drew aside one of the window-curtains, and looked searchingly at Aramis to see if the prelate required anything further. "Well, Monseigneur," said he, still standing up, "of all men of their word, you still continue to be the most punctual."

"In matters of business, dear M. de Baisemeaux, exactitude is not a virtue only, but a duty as well."

"Yes, in matters of business, certainly; but your affair with me is not of that character, my Lord, — it is a service you are rendering me."

"Come, come, dear M. de Baisemeaux, confess that, notwithstanding this exactitude, you have not been without a little uneasiness."

"About your health, yes, certainly," stammered Baisemeaux.

"I wished to come here yesterday, but I was not able,

as I was too fatigued," continued Aramis. Baisemeaux anxiously slipped another cushion behind his guest's back. "But," continued Aramis, "I promised myself to come and pay you a visit to-day, early in the morning."

"You are really very kind, Monseigneur."

"And it was a good thing for me that I was punctual, I think."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, you were going out."

At this latter remark Baisemeaux colored and said, "Yes, it is true I was going out."

"Then I incommode you," said Aramis; whereupon the embarrassment of Baisemeaux became visibly greater. "I am putting you to inconvenience," he continued, fixing a keen glance upon the poor governor; "if I had known that, I should not have come."

"Ah! Monseigneur, how can you imagine that you could ever inconvenience me?"

"Confess that you were going in quest of money."

"No," stammered Baisemeaux, "no, I assure you I was going to —"

"Does the governor still intend to go to M. Fouquet's?" suddenly called out the major from below. Baisemeaux ran to the window like a madman. "No, no!" he exclaimed in a state of desperation; "who the deuce is speaking of M. Fouquet? Are you drunk below there? Why am I interrupted when I am busy?"

"You were going to M. Fouquet's," said Aramis, biting his lips, — "to the abbé's or the superintendent's?"

Baisemeaux almost made up his mind to tell an untruth, but he could not summon courage to do so. "To Monsieur the Superintendent's," he said.

"It is true, then, that you were in want of money, since you were going to the person who gives it away?"

"I assure you, Monseigneur —"

"You distrusted me."

"My dear Lord, it was the uncertainty and ignorance in which I was as to where you were to be found."

"You would have found the money you require at M. Fouquet's, dear M. Baisemeaux, for he is a man whose hand is always open."

"I swear that I should never have ventured to ask M. Fouquet for money. I only wished to ask him for your address, that is all."

"To ask M. Fouquet for my address?" exclaimed Aramis, opening his eyes in real astonishment.

"Yes," said Baisemeaux, greatly disturbed by the glance which the prelate fixed upon him, "at M. Fouquet's, certainly."

"There is no harm in that, dear M. Baisemeaux; only I would ask, Why ask my address of M. Fouquet?"

"That I might write to you."

"I understand," said Aramis, smiling; "but that is not what I meant. I do not ask you what you required my address for; I only ask why you should go to M. Fouquet for it?"

"Oh!" said Baisemeaux, "as Belle-Isle is the property of M. Fouquet, and as Belle-Isle is in the diocese of Vannes, and as you are bishop of Vannes —"

"But, my dear Baisemeaux, since you knew that I was bishop of Vannes, you had no occasion to ask M. Fouquet for my address."

"Well, Monsieur," said Baisemeaux, at his wits' end, "if I have acted indiscreetly, I beg your pardon most sincerely."

"Nonsense!" observed Aramis, calmly; "how can you possibly have acted indiscreetly?" And while he composed his face, and smiled cheerfully on the governor, he

was considering how Baisemeaux, who was not aware of his address, yet knew that Vannes was his residence. "I will clear all this up," he said to himself; and then speaking aloud, added, "Well, my dear governor, shall we now arrange our little accounts?"

"I am at your orders, my Lord; but tell me beforehand, my Lord, whether you will do me the honor to breakfast with me as usual?"

"Very willingly indeed."

"That is right," said Baisemeaux, as he struck the bell before him three times.

"What does that mean?" inquired Aramis.

"That I have some one to breakfast with me, and that preparations are to be made accordingly."

"And you rang thrice. Really, my dear governor, I begin to think that you are acting ceremoniously with me."

"Oh, no, indeed! Besides, the least I can do is to receive you in the best way I can."

"But why so?"

"Because not a prince, even, would have done what you have for me."

"Nonsense, nonsense!"

"Nay, I assure you —"

"Let us speak of other matters," said Aramis; "or rather, tell me how your affairs here are getting on. Are the prisoners generous?"

"Not over-much."

"The deuce!"

"M. de Mazarin was not hard enough."

"Yes, I see, you need a suspicious government, — like that of the old cardinal, for instance."

"Yes, business was better under him. The brother of his 'gray Eminence' made his fortune in it."

"Believe me, my dear governor," said Aramis, drawing closer to Baisemeaux, "a young king is well worth an old cardinal. Youth has its suspicions, its fits of anger, its prejudices, as old age has its hatreds, its precautions, and its fears. Have you paid your three years' profits to Louvière and to Tremblay?"

"Good heavens! yes."

"So that you have nothing more to give them than the fifty thousand livres which I have brought you?"

"Yes."

"You have not saved anything, then?"

"Ah, Monseigneur, in giving the fifty thousand livres of my own to these gentlemen, I assure you that I give them everything I earn. I told M d'Artagnan so yesterday evening."

"Ah!" said Aramis, whose eyes sparkled for a moment, but immediately became quiet again; "so you have seen my old friend D'Artagnan. How was he?"

"Wonderfully well."

"And what did you say to him, M. de Baisemeaux?"

"I told him," continued the governor, not perceiving his own thoughtlessness, — "I told him that I fed my prisoners too well."

"How many have you?" inquired Aramis, in an indifferent tone of voice.

"Sixty."

"Well, that is a tolerably round number."

"Ah, Monseigneur, formerly there were, during certain years, as many as two hundred."

"Still a minimum of sixty is not to be grumbled at."

"Perhaps not; for to anybody but myself each prisoner would bring in one hundred and fifty pistoles, — for instance, for a prince of the blood I have fifty livres a day."

"Only, you have no prince of the blood; at least, I

suppose so," said Aramis, with a slight tremor in his voice.

"No, thank Heaven! — I mean, no, unfortunately."

"Why do you say 'unfortunately'?"

"Because my position would be improved by it. So, fifty livres per day for a prince of the blood, thirty-six for a marshal of France — "

"But you have no more marshals of France just now, I suppose, than princes of the blood?"

"Alas! no; it is true that lieutenant-generals and brigadiers pay twenty-four livres, and I have two of them. After that come the councillors of the parliament, who bring me fifteen livres, and I have six of them."

"I did not know," said Aramis, "that councillors were worth so much."

"Yes; but from fifteen livres I sink at once to ten, — namely, for an ordinary judge or for an ecclesiastic."

"And you have seven, you say; a fine catch!"

"Nay, a bad one, and for this reason. How can I possibly treat these poor fellows, who are of some importance at all events, otherwise than I treat a councillor of the parliament?"

"Yes, you are right; I do not see five livres' difference between them."

"You understand, if I have a fine fish, I always pay four or five livres for it; if I get a fine fowl, it costs me a livre and a half. I fatten a good deal of poultry, but I have to buy grain, and you cannot imagine the multitude of rats which infest this place."

"Why not get half-a-dozen cats to deal with them?"

"Cats, indeed; yes, they eat them, but I was obliged to give up the idea because of the way in which they treated my grain. I have been obliged to have some terrier dogs sent me from England to kill the rats. The

dogs have tremendous appetites; they eat as much as a prisoner of the fifth order, without taking into account the rabbits and fowls they kill." Was Aramis really listening or not? No one could have told; his downcast eyes showed the attentive man, but the restless hand betrayed the man absorbed in thought, — Aramis was meditating. "I was saying," continued Baisemeaux, "that a passable fowl costs me a livre and a half, and that a good-sized fish costs me four or five livres. Three meals are served at the Bastille, and as the prisoners, having nothing to do, are always eating, a ten livre man costs me seven livres and a half."

"But did you not say that you treated those at ten livres like those at fifteen?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Very well! Then you gain seven livres and a half upon those who pay you fifteen livres."

"I must compensate myself somehow," said Baisemeaux, who saw that he had been caught.

"You are quite right, my dear governor; but have you no prisoners below ten livres?"

"Oh, yes; we have citizens and barristers taxed at five livres."

"And do they eat too?"

"Not a doubt about it; only, you understand they do not get a sole or a fat chicken or Spanish wines every day, but at all events thrice a week they have a good dish for their dinner."

"Really, you are quite a philanthropist, my dear governor, and you will ruin yourself."

"No; understand me. When the fifteen-livre has not eaten his fowl, or the ten-livre has left his dish unfinished, I send it to the five-livre prisoner; it is a feast for the poor devil, and one must be charitable, you know."

"And what do you make out of your five livre prisoners?"

"A livre and a half."

"Baisemeaux, you're an honest fellow; in honest truth, I say so."

"Thank you, my Lord, I think you are quite right, now. But I feel most for the small tradesmen and bailiffs' clerks, who are rated at three livres. Those do not often see Rhine carp or Channel sturgeon."

"But do not the five-livre gentlemen sometimes leave some scraps?"

"Oh, my Lord, do not believe I am so stingy as that! I delight the heart of some poor little tradesman or clerk by sending him a wing of red partridge, a slice of venison, or a bit of truffled pasty, — dishes which he never tasted except in his dreams, and which are the leavings of the twenty-four-livre prisoners, — and he eats and drinks, at dessert he cries, 'Long live the king!' and blesses the Bastille; with a couple of bottles of champagne, which cost me five sous, I make him tipsy every Sunday. That class of people call down blessings upon me, and are sorry to leave the prison. Do you know that I have remarked — and it does me infinite honor — that certain prisoners who have been set at liberty have almost immediately afterwards got imprisoned again? Why should this be the case, if not to taste my fare? It is really the fact." Aramis smiled with an expression of incredulity.

"You smile," said Baisemeaux.

"I do," returned Aramis.

"I tell you that we have names which have been inscribed on our books thrice in the space of two years."

"I must see it to believe it," said Aramis.

"Well, I can show it to you, although it is forbidden to exhibit the registers to strangers; and if you really wish to see it with your own eyes — "

"I should be delighted, I confess."

"Very well," said Baisemeaux; and he took out of a closet a large register. Aramis eagerly followed him with his eyes, and Baisemeaux returned, placed the register upon the table, turned over the leaves for a minute, and stopped at the letter M.

"Look here, for instance," said he: "'Martinier, January, 1659, Martinier, June, 1660; Martinier, March, 1661, pamphlets, Mazarinades, etc.' You understand it was only a pretext, people were not sent to the Bastille for jokes against M. Mazarin, the fellow denounced himself in order to get imprisoned here. And what was his object, Monsieur? None other than to return to eat my fare at three livres the head!"

"Three livres — poor devil!"

"The poet, my Lord, belongs to the lowest scale, to the same style of board to which the small tradesman and bailiff's clerk belong; but, I repeat, it is to these people only that I give those little surprises."

Aramis mechanically turned over the leaves of the register, continuing to read without appearing to take any interest in the names he read.

"In 1661 you perceive," said Baisemeaux, "eighty entries; and in 1659, eighty also."

"Ah!" said Aramis. "Seldon; I seem to know that name. Was it not you who spoke to me about a certain young man?"

"Yes, a poor devil of a student who made — What do you call that where two Latin verses rhyme together?"

"A distich."

"Yes! that is it."

"Poor fellow! for a distich."

"*Peste!* How you go on! Do you not know that he made this distich against the Jesuits?"

"That makes no difference; the punishment seems very severe."

"Do not pity him; last year you seemed to interest yourself in him."

"Yes, I did so."

"Well, as your interest is all-powerful here, my Lord, since that time I have treated him as a prisoner at fifteen livres."

"The same as this one, then," said Aramis, who had continued to turn over the leaves, and who had stopped at one of the names which followed that of Martinier.

"Yes, the same as that one."

"Is that Marchiali an Italian?" asked Aramis, pointing with his finger to the name which had attracted his attention.

"Hush!" said Baisemeaux.

"Why hush?" said Aramis, involuntarily clinching his white hand.

"I thought I had already spoken to you about that Marchiali."

"No; this is the first time I ever heard his name pronounced."

"That may be, but I may have spoken to you about him without naming him."

"Is he an old offender?" asked Aramis, attempting to smile.

"On the contrary, he is quite young."

"Is his crime, then, very heinous?"

"Unpardonable."

"Has he assassinated any one?"

"Bah!"

"An incendiary, then?"

"Bah!"

"Has he slandered any one?"

"No, no! It is he who — " and Baisemeaux approached Aramis's ear, making a sort of ear-trumpet of his hands, and whispered, — "it is he who presumes to resemble the — "

"Yes, yes," said Aramis, "I now remember that you spoke to me about it last year, but the crime appeared to me so slight."

"Slight!"

"Or rather, so involuntary."

"My Lord, it is not involuntarily that such a resemblance is detected."

"Well, the fact is, I had forgotten it. But, my dear host," said Aramis, closing the register, "if I am not mistaken, we are summoned"

Baisemeaux took the register, hastily restored it to its place in the closet, which he closed, and put the key in his pocket. "Will it be agreeable to your Lordship to breakfast now?" said he; "for you are right in supposing that breakfast was announced."

"Assuredly, my dear governor," and they passed into the dining-room.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

M. DE BAISEMEAUX'S BREAKFAST.

ARAMIS was generally temperate, but on this occasion, while observing due caution in regard to the wine, he did ample justice to Baisemeaux's breakfast, which in every respect was most excellent. The latter, for his part, was animated with the wildest gayety, the sight of the five thousand pistoles, which he glanced at from time to time, expanded his heart. Every now and then, too, he looked at Aramis with an expression of the deepest gratitude, while the latter, leaning back in his chair, sipped a few drops of wine from his glass, with the air of a connoisseur. "Let me never hear an ill word against the fare of the Bastille," said he, half closing his eyes, "happy are the prisoners who can get only half a bottle of this Burgundy every day!"

"All those at fifteen livres drink it," said Baisemeaux. "It is very old Volnay."

"Does that poor student Seldon drink this excellent Volnay?"

"Oh, no!"

"I thought I heard you say that he was boarded at fifteen livres."

"He! No, indeed! A man who makes districts — distichs I mean — at fifteen livres! Nonsense! it is his neighbor who is at fifteen livres."

"Which neighbor?"

"The other; the second Bertaudière."

"Excuse me, my dear governor; but you speak a language which requires an apprenticeship to understand."

"Very true," said the governor. "Allow me to explain: the second Bertaudière is the person who occupies the second floor of the tower of the Bertaudière."

"So that Bertaudière is the name of one of the towers of the Bastille? The fact is, I think I recollect hearing that each tower has a name of its own. Whereabouts is the one you are speaking of?"

"Look!" said Baisemeaux, going to the window. "It is that tower to the left, — the second one."

"Is the prisoner at fifteen livres there?"

"Yes."

"Since when?"

"Seven or eight years, nearly."

"What do you mean by nearly? Do you not know the dates more precisely?"

"It was not in my time, dear M. d'Herblay."

"But I should have thought that Louvière or Tremblay would have told you."

"The secrets of the Bastille are never handed over with the keys of its governorship."

"Indeed! Then the cause of his imprisonment is a mystery, a State secret."

"Oh, no! I do not suppose it is a State secret, but a secret like everything else that happens at the Bastille."

"But," said Aramis, "why do you speak more freely of Seldon than of — "

"Of the second Bertaudière?"

"Yes."

"Because, in my opinion, the crime of the man who writes a distich is not so great as that of the man who resembles —"

"Yes, yes; I understand you. Still, do not the turnkeys talk with your prisoners?"

"Of course."

"The prisoners, I suppose, tell them they are not guilty?"

"They are always telling them that; it is a matter of course, — the same song over and over again."

"But does not the resemblance you were just now speaking about strike the turnkeys?"

"My dear M. d'Herblay, it is only for men attached to the court as you are, to take any trouble about such matters."

"You're right, you're right, my dear M. de Baisemeaux. Just a drop more of that Volnay, if you please."

"Not a drop merely; a glass."

"Nay, nay! You are a musketeer still, to the very tips of your fingers, while I have become a bishop. A drop for me; a glass for yourself."

"As you please," and Aramis and the governor touched glasses.

"But," said Aramis, looking with fixed attention at the ruby liquid he had raised to the level of his eyes, as if he wished to enjoy it with all his senses alike, — "but what you might call a resemblance, another would not perhaps take any notice of."

"Most certainly he would, though, if it were any one who knew the person he resembles."

"I really think, dear M. de Baisemeaux, that it can be nothing more than a resemblance of your own imagination."

"Upon my honor, it is not so."

"Stay!" continued Aramis. "I have seen many persons very like the one we are speaking of; but, out of respect, no one ever said anything about it."

"Very likely; because there is resemblance and resemblance. This is a striking one; and if you were to see him, you would admit it to be so yourself."

"If I were to see him, indeed," said Aramis, in an indifferent tone; "but in all probability I never shall."

"Why not?"

"Because if I were even to put my foot inside one of those horrible dungeons, I should fancy that I was buried there forever."

"Oh, no; they are fine places to live in."

"I really do not and cannot believe it, and that is a fact."

"Pray do not speak ill of the second Bertaudière! It is really a good room, very nicely furnished and carpeted. The young fellow has by no means been unhappy there; the best lodging the Bastille affords has been his. There is a chance for you."

"Nay, nay," said Aramis, coldly, "you will never make me believe that there are any good rooms in the Bastille; and as for your carpets, they exist only in your imagination. I should find nothing but spiders, rats, and perhaps toads too."

"Toads? Ah! I don't say there are not toads in the dungeons."

"But I should see no furniture and not a sign of a carpet."

"Will you be convinced by your own eyes?" said Baisemeaux, with sudden impulse.

"No, certainly not."

"Not even to satisfy yourself of the resemblance which you deny, as you deny the existence of the carpets?"

"Some spectral-looking person, a mere shadow, — an unhappy, dying man."

"Nothing of the kind, — as brisk and vigorous a young fellow as ever lived."

"Melancholy and ill-tempered, then?"

"Not at all; very gay and lively."

"Nonsense! you are joking."

"Will you follow me?" said Baisemeaux.

"What for?"

"To go the round of the Bastille."

"Why?"

"You will then see for yourself, — see with your own eyes."

"But the regulations?"

"Never mind them! To-day my major has leave of absence; the lieutenant is visiting the posts on the bastions; we are masters of the position."

"No, no, my dear governor! Why, the very idea of the sound of the bolts which we must draw makes me shudder. You will only have to forget me in the second or fourth Bertaudière. Ugh! —"

"You are refusing a rare opportunity. Do you know that to obtain the favor I propose to you gratis, some of the princes of the blood have offered me as much as fifty thousand livres."

"Really! he must be worth seeing, then?"

"Forbidden fruit, my Lord, — forbidden fruit! You who belong to the Church ought to know that."

"Well, if I had any curiosity, it would be to see the poor author of the distich."

"Very well, we will see him too, he is near by; but if I were at all curious, it would be about the beautiful carpeted room and its lodger."

"Furniture is very commonplace; and a face with no expression in it offers little or no interest."

"But a boarder at fifteen livres is always interesting."

"By the by, I forgot to ask you about that. Why fifteen livres for him, and only three livres for poor Seldon?"

"The distinction made in that instance was a truly

noble act, and one which displayed the king's goodness of heart to great advantage."

"The king's, you say?"

"The cardinal's, I mean; 'This unhappy man,' said M. de Mazarin, 'is destined to remain in prison forever.'"

"Why so?"

"Why, it seems that his crime is a lasting one; and consequently his punishment ought to be so too."

"Lasting?"

"No doubt of it, unless he is fortunate enough to catch the small-pox, you see; and even that chance is unlikely, for we never have any impure air in the Bastille."

"Nothing can be more ingenious than your train of reasoning, my dear M. de Baisemeaux. Do you mean to say, however, that this unfortunate man must suffer without respite and forever?"

"I did not say suffer, my Lord; a fifteen-livre boarder does not suffer."

"He suffers imprisonment, at all events."

"No doubt; there is no help for that But this suffering is sweetened for him. You must admit that this young fellow was not born to eat all the good things he does eat: for instance, such things as we have on the table now, — this pasty that has not been touched, these crawfish from the river Marne, of which we have hardly taken any, and which are almost as large as lobsters, — all these things will at once be taken to the second Bertaudière, with a bottle of that Volnay which you think so good. After you have seen it, you will believe it, I hope."

"Yes, my dear governor, certainly; but all this time you are thinking only of your blissful fifteen-livre prisoner, and you forget poor Seldon, my *protégé*."

"Well, out of consideration for you, it shall be a gala-

day for him; he shall have some biscuits and preserves, with this small bottle of port."

"You are a good-hearted fellow; I have said so already, and I repeat it, my dear Baisemeaux."

"Well, let us set off, then," said the governor, a little giddy, partly from the wine he had drunk and partly from Aramis's praises.

"Do not forget that I go only to oblige you," said the prelate.

"Very well; but you will thank me when you get there."

"Let us go, then."

"Wait until I have summoned the jailer," said Baisemeaux, as he struck the bell twice; at which summons a man appeared. "I am going to visit the towers," said the governor; "no guards, no drums, no noise at all!"

"If I were not to leave my cloak here," said Aramis, pretending to be alarmed, "I should really think that I was going to prison on my own account." The jailer preceded the governor, Aramis walking on his right hand; some of the soldiers who happened to be in the courtyard drew themselves up in line, as stiff as posts, as the governor passed along. Baisemeaux led the way down several steps which brought them to a sort of esplanade, thence they arrived at the drawbridge, where the sentinels on duty received the governor with the proper honors. The governor turned towards Aramis, and speaking in such a tone that the sentinels could not lose a word, he said, "I hope you have a good memory, Monsieur?"

"Why?" inquired Aramis.

"On account of your plans and measurements; for you know that no one, not even an architect, is allowed to enter where the prisoners are, if he has paper, pens, or pencil."

"Good," said Aramis to himself, "it seems that I am an architect, then? It sounds like one of D'Artagnan's jokes, who saw me acting as an engineer at Belle-Isle." Then he said aloud, "Be easy on that score, Monsieur; in our profession a mere glance and a good memory are quite sufficient."

Baisemeaux did not change countenance, and the soldiers took Aramis for what he seemed to be. "Very well; we will first visit La Bertaudière," said Baisemeaux, still intending the sentinels to hear him. Then, turning to the jailer, he added, "You will take the opportunity of carrying to No. 2 the few dainties I pointed out."

"Dear M. de Baisemeaux," said Aramis, "you are always forgetting No. 3."

"So I am," said the governor, and upon that, they began to ascend. The number of bolts, gratings, and locks for this single courtyard would have sufficed for the safety of an entire city. Aramis was neither an imaginative nor a sensitive man, he had been somewhat of a poet in his youth, but his heart was hard and indifferent, as is the heart of every man of fifty-five years of age, who has been frequently and passionately attached to women in his lifetime, or rather who has been passionately loved by them. But when he placed his foot upon the worn stone steps along which so many unhappy wretches had passed, when he felt himself impregnated as it were with the atmosphere of those gloomy arches moistened with tears, there could be but little doubt that he was overcome by his feelings, for his head was bowed and his eyes became dim, and he followed Baisemeaux without uttering a syllable.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SECOND FLOOR OF LA BERTAUDIÈRE.

On the second flight of stairs, whether from fatigue or emotion, the breath of the visitor began to fail him, and he leaned against the wall. "Will you begin with this one?" said Baisemeaux; "for since we are going to both, it matters very little whether we ascend from the second to the third story, or descend from the third to the second. There are, besides, certain repairs to be made in this chamber," he hastened to add for the benefit of the turnkey, who he saw was within the sound of his voice.

"No, no," exclaimed Aramis, eagerly; "higher, if you please, Monsieur the Governor. The one above is the more urgent." They continued their ascent.

"Ask the jailer for the keys," whispered Aramis.

Baisemeaux did so, took the keys, and himself opened the door of room No. 3. The jailer was the first to enter; he placed upon the table the provisions which the kind-hearted governor called dainties, and then left the room. The prisoner had not stirred. Baisemeaux then entered, while Aramis remained at the threshold, from which place he saw a youth of about eighteen years of age, who raising his head at the unusual noise jumped off the bed, as he perceived the governor, and clasping his hands began to cry out, "My mother, my mother!" in tones which betrayed such deep distress that Aramis, despite his command over himself, felt a shudder pass through his frame.

"My dear boy," said Baisemeaux, endeavoring to smile, "I have brought you a diversion and an extra, — the one for the mind, the other for the body; this gentleman has come to take some measures about here, and here are some preserves for your dessert."

"Oh, Monsieur," exclaimed the young man, "keep me in solitude for a year, let me have nothing but bread and water for a year, but tell me that at the end of that time I shall leave this place, tell me that at the end of a year I shall then see my mother again!"

"But, my dear friend," said Baisemeaux, "I have heard you say that your mother was very poor, and that you were very badly lodged when you were living with her; while here — upon my word!"

"If she were poor, Monsieur, the greater reason to restore her only means of support to her! Badly lodged with her! oh, Monsieur, every one is always well lodged when he is free."

"At all events, since you yourself admit that you have done nothing but write that unhappy distich —"

"But without meaning anything, I swear; I was reading Martial when the idea came to me. Let me be punished, — cut off the hand with which I wrote it, I will work with the other, — but restore my mother to me!"

"My boy," said Baisemeaux, "you know very well that it does not depend upon me; all I can do for you is to increase your rations, give you a glass of port wine now and then, or slip in a biscuit for you between a couple of plates."

"My God!" exclaimed the young man, falling backward and rolling on the floor.

Aramis, unable to bear this scene any longer, withdrew as far as the landing. "Poor wretch!" he murmured.

"Yes, Monsieur, he is indeed very wretched," said the jailer; "but it is his parents' fault."

"In what way?"

"Because they let him learn Latin. Too much knowledge, you see; there is the harm. Now I, for instance, can't read or write, and therefore I am not in prison."

Aramis looked at the man who did not call being a jailer in the Bastille being in prison. As for Baisemeaux, noticing the little effect produced by his advice and his port wine, he left the dungeon quite upset.

"You have forgotten to close the door," said the jailer.

"So I have," said Baisemeaux; "there are the keys, do you do it."

"I will solicit the pardon of that poor boy," said Aramis.

"And if you do not succeed," said Baisemeaux, "at least beg that he may be transferred to the ten-livre list, by which both he and I shall be gainers."

"If the other prisoner calls out for his mother in a similar manner," said Aramis, "I prefer not to enter at all, but will take my measurements from outside."

"No fear of that, Monsieur architect," said the jailer. "This one here is as gentle as a lamb; before he could call after his mother he must open his lips, and he never says a word."

"Let us go in, then," said Aramis, gloomily.

"Are you the architect of the prisons, Monsieur?" said the jailer.

"I am."

"It is odd, then, that you are not more accustomed to all this."

Aramis perceived that, to avoid giving rise to any suspicions, he must summon all his strength of mind to

his assistance. Baisemeaux, who carried the keys, opened the door. "Stay outside," said he to the jailer, "and wait for us at the bottom of the steps." The jailer obeyed, and withdrew.

Baisemeaux entered first, and opened the second door himself. By the light which filtered through the iron-barred window could be seen a handsome young man, short in stature, with closely cut hair, and a beard just beginning to grow; he was sitting on a stool, his elbow resting on an arm-chair, and all the upper part of his body reclining against it His coat, thrown upon the bed, was of rich black velvet; and he inhaled the fresh air blowing in upon his breast, which was covered with a shirt of the very finest cambric. As the governor entered, the young man turned his head with a look full of indifference; and on recognizing Baisemeaux, he arose and saluted him courteously. But when his eyes fell upon Aramis, who remained in the background, the latter trembled, turned pale, and his hat, which he held in his hand, slipped from his fingers as if all his muscles had become relaxed at once. Baisemeaux during this time, accustomed to the presence of his prisoner, did not seem to share any of the sensations which Aramis experienced, but, with all the zeal of a good servant, was arranging on the table the pasty and crawfish which he had brought with him. Occupied in this manner, he did not notice how disturbed his guest had become. When he had finished, however, he turned to the young prisoner and said, "You are looking very well; I am glad to see that."

"Quite well, I thank you, Monsieur," replied the young man.

The effect of the voice was such as almost to overpower Aramis, and involuntarily he made a step forward, his

lips trembling. The movement he made was so marked that Baisemeaux, notwithstanding his occupation, could not help observing it. "This gentleman is an architect who has come to examine your chimney," said Baisemeaux; "does it smoke?"

"Never, Monsieur."

"You were saying just now," said the governor to Aramis, rubbing his hands together, "that it is not possible for a man to be happy in prison, here, however, is one who is so." Then turning to the prisoner, he said, "You have nothing to complain of, I hope?"

"Never."

"Do you ever feel low-spirited?" said Aramis.

"Never."

"Ha! ha!" said Baisemeaux, in a low voice; "was I right?"

"Well, my dear governor, it is impossible not to yield to evidence. Is it allowable to put any questions to him?"

"As many as you like."

"Very well, be good enough to ask him if he knows why he is here"

"Monsieur requests me to ask you," said Baisemeaux, "if you are aware of the cause of your imprisonment?"

"No, Monsieur," said the young man, unaffectedly, "I am not."

"But that is impossible," said Aramis, carried away by his feelings in spite of himself; "if you were really ignorant of the cause of your detention, you would be furious."

"I was so during the earlier days of my imprisonment."

"Why are you not so now?"

"Because I have reflected."

"That is strange," said Aramis.

"Is it not odd?" said Baisemeaux.

"May one venture to ask you, Monsieur, on what you have reflected?"

"I felt that, as I had committed no crime, Heaven could not punish me."

"What is a prison, then," inquired Aramis, "if it be not a punishment?"

"Alas! I cannot tell," said the young man; "all that I can tell you now is the very opposite of what I felt seven years ago."

"To hear you converse, Monsieur, to witness your resignation, one might almost believe that you liked your imprisonment."

"I endure it."

"In the certainty of recovering your freedom some day, I suppose?"

"I have no certainty. Hope I have, and that is all; and yet I acknowledge that this hope becomes less every day."

"Still, why should you not again be free, since you have already been so?"

"That is precisely the reason," replied the young man, "which prevents me from expecting liberty; why should I have been imprisoned at all, if it had been intended to release me afterwards?"

"How old are you?"

"I do not know."

"What is your name?"

"I have forgotten the name by which I was called."

"Who are your parents?"

"I never knew them."

"But those who brought you up?"

"They did not call me their son."

"Did you ever love any one before coming here?"

"I loved my nurse and my flowers."

"Was that all?"

"I also loved my valet."

"Do you regret your nurse and your valet?"

"I wept very much when they died."

"Did they die since you have been here, or before you came?"

"They died the evening before I was carried off."

"Both at the same time?"

"Yes, both at the same time."

"In what manner were you carried off?"

"A man came for me, made me get into a carriage, which was closed and locked, and brought me here."

"Would you be able to recognize that man again?"

"He was masked."

"Is not this an extraordinary tale?" said Baisemeaux, in a low voice, to Aramis, who could hardly breathe.

"It is indeed extraordinary," murmured Aramis.

"But what is still more extraordinary is that he has never told me so much as he has just told you."

"Perhaps the reason may be that you have never questioned him," said Aramis.

"It is possible," replied Baisemeaux; "I have no curiosity. Well, have you looked at the room; it's a fine one, is it not?"

"Very fine."

"A carpet —"

"Beautiful."

"I'll wager he had nothing like it before he came here."

"I think so too." Then, again turning towards the young man, Aramis asked, "Do you not remember to have been visited, at some time or other, by a strange lady or gentleman?"

"Yes, indeed; thrice by a woman, who each time came

to the door in a carriage, and entered covered with a veil, which she only raised when we were together and alone."

"Do you remember that woman?"

"Yes."

"What did she say to you?"

The young man smiled mournfully, "She inquired, as you have just done, if I were happy, and if I were getting weary."

"What did she do on arriving, and on leaving you?"

"She pressed me in her arms, held me in her embrace, and kissed me."

"Do you remember her?"

"Perfectly."

"Do you recall her features distinctly?"

"Yes."

"You would recognize her, then, if accident brought her before you, or led you into her presence?"

"Most certainly."

A flash of fleeting satisfaction passed across Aramis's face At this moment Baisemeaux heard the jailer coming up again. "Shall we leave?" he said hastily to Aramis.

Aramis, who probably had learned all that he cared to know, replied, "When you like."

The young man saw them prepare to leave, and saluted them politely. Baisemeaux replied merely by a nod of the head; while Aramis, with a respect arising doubtless from the sight of such misfortune, saluted the prisoner profoundly. They left the room, Baisemeaux closing the door behind them.

"Well," said Baisemeaux, on the staircase, "what do you think of it all?"

"I have discovered the secret, my dear governor," he said.

"Bah! What is the secret, then?"

"A murder was committed in that house."

"Nonsense!"

"But attend! the valet and the nurse died the same day."

"Well?"

"And by poison."

"Ah!"

"What do you think?"

"That it is very likely to be true — What! that young man is an assassin?"

"Who said that? What makes you think that poor boy could be an assassin?"

"The very thing I was saying."

"The crime was committed in his house, that is all; perhaps he saw the criminals, and it was feared that he might say something."

"The deuce! if I only thought that —"

"Well?"

"I would increase the watch over him."

"Oh! he does not seem to wish to escape."

"You do not know what prisoners are."

"Has he any books?"

"None; they are strictly prohibited, and by M. Mazarin's own hand."

"Have you the writing still?"

"Yes, Monseigneur; would you like to look at it as you return to get your cloak?"

"I should very much, for I like to look at autographs."

"This one is of the most unquestionable authenticity; there is only one erasure."

"Ah! an erasure; and in what respect?"

"With respect to a figure. At first there was written: 'To be boarded at 50 livres.'"

"Like princes of the blood, in fact?"

"But the cardinal must have seen his mistake, you understand, for he scratched out the zero, and has added a 1 before the 5. But, by the by —"

"What?"

"You do not speak of the resemblance."

"I do not speak of it, dear M. de Baisemeaux, for a very simple reason, — because it does not exist."

"The deuce it does n't!"

"Or, if it does exist, it is only in your own imagination; but, supposing it were to exist elsewhere, I think you would do well not to speak about it."

"Really."

"The king Louis XIV., you understand, would be mortally angry with you, if he were to learn that you contributed to spread the report that one of his subjects has the effrontery to resemble him."

"It is true, quite true," said Baisemeaux, thoroughly alarmed; "but I have not spoken of the circumstance to any one but yourself, and you understand, Monseigneur, that I perfectly rely on your discretion."

"Oh, be easy!"

"Do you still wish to see the note?" said Baisemeaux, uneasily.

"Certainly."

While conversing thus, they had returned to the governor's apartments. Baisemeaux took from the closet a private register, like the one which he had already shown to Aramis, but fastened by a lock, the key which opened it being one of a small bunch of keys which Baisemeaux always carried with him. Then placing the book upon the table, he opened it at the letter "M," and showed Aramis the following note in the column of observations: —

"No BOOKS AT ANY TIME; the finest quality of linen and the most elegant clothes; NO EXERCISE; ALWAYS THE SAME JAILER; NO COMMUNICATIONS WITH ANY ONE. Musical instruments; every liberty which his welfare may require; to be boarded at 15 livres M. de Baisemeaux can claim more, if the 15 livres be not sufficient."

"Ah," said Baisemeaux, "now I think of it, I shall claim it."

Aramis shut the book. "Yes," he said, "it is indeed from the hand of M. de Mazarin; I recognize the writing. Now, my dear governor," he continued, as if this last communication had exhausted his interest, "let us now turn, if you please, to our own little affairs."

"Well, what time for payment do you wish me to take? Fix it yourself."

"We will not fix any particular period; give me a simple acknowledgment for one hundred and fifty thousand livres."

"When to be made payable?"

"At my demand. But you understand, I shall only wish it when you yourself do so."

"Oh, I am quite easy on that score," said Baisemeaux, smiling; "but I have already given you two receipts."

"Which I now destroy," said Aramis; and after having shown the two receipts to the governor, he destroyed them. Overcome by so great a mark of confidence, Baisemeaux unhesitatingly signed an acknowledgment of a debt of one hundred and fifty thousand livres, payable at the pleasure of the prelate. Aramis, who had, by glancing over the governor's shoulder, followed the pen as he wrote, put the acknowledgment into his pocket without seeming to have read it, which made Baisemeaux perfectly easy. "Now," said Aramis, "you would not be

angry with me, would you, if I were to carry off one of your prisoners?"

"What do you mean?"

"By obtaining his pardon, of course. Have I not already told you that I took a great interest in poor Seldon?"

"Yes, quite true."

"Well?"

"That is your affair; do as you think proper. I see you have an open hand, and an arm that can reach a great way."

"Adieu, adieu!" and Aramis left, carrying with him the governor's blessings.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE TWO FRIENDS.

At the very time when M. de Baisemeaux was showing Aramis the prisoners in the Bastille, a carriage drew up at Madame de Bellière's door, and at that still early hour a young woman alighted, her head muffled in a silk hood. When the servants announced Madame Vanel to Madame de Bellière, the latter was engaged, or rather was absorbed, in reading a letter, which she hurriedly concealed. She had hardly finished her morning toilette, her women being still in the next room. At the name, at the footsteps, of Marguerite Vanel, Madame de Bellière ran to meet her. She fancied that she could detect in her friend's eye a brightness which was neither that of health nor of pleasure.

Marguerite embraced her, pressed her hands, and hardly allowed her time to speak. "Dearest," she said, "are you forgetting me? Have you quite given yourself up to the pleasures of the court?"

"I have not even seen the marriage *fêtes*."

"What are you doing with yourself, then?"

"I am getting ready to leave for Bellière."

"For Bellière?"

"Yes."

"Rustic in your tastes, then; I delight to see you so disposed. But you are pale."

"No, I am perfectly well."

"So much the better; I was becoming uneasy about you. You do not know what I have been told."

"People say so many things."

"Yes, but this is extraordinary."

"How well you know how to excite curiosity, Marguerite!"

"Well, I was afraid of vexing you."

"Never; you have yourself always admired me for my evenness of temper."

"Well, then, it is said that — Oh, really, I shall never be able to tell you."

"Do not let us talk about it, then," said Madame de Bellière, who detected the ill-nature which was concealed by all these prefaces, yet felt consumed with curiosity.

"Well, then, my dear marchioness, it is said that for some time past you have mourned much less for poor M. de Bellière."

"It is an ill natured report, Marguerite. I do mourn, and shall always mourn, my husband, but it is now two years since he died. I am only twenty-eight years old, and my grief at his loss ought not to control every action and thought of my life. You, Marguerite, who are the model of a wife, would not believe me if I were to say so."

"Why not? Your heart is so tender," said Madame Vanel, spitefully.

"Yours is so too, Marguerite, and yet I did not perceive that you allowed yourself to be overcome by grief when your heart was wounded." These words were in direct allusion to Marguerite's rupture with the superintendent, and were also a veiled but direct reproach made against the young woman's heart.

As if she only awaited this signal to discharge her shaft, Marguerite exclaimed, "Well, Élise, it is said that you are in love;" and she looked fixedly at Madame de Bellière, who blushed without being able to prevent it.

"Women never escape slander," replied the marchioness, after a moment's pause.

"Oh! no one slanders you, Élise."

"What! people say that I am in love, and yet they do not slander me!"

"In the first place, if it be true, there is no slander, but simply a piece of gossip. In the next place, — for you did not allow me to finish, — the public does not assert that you have abandoned yourself to this passion. It represents you, on the contrary, as a virtuous but loving woman, defending yourself tooth and nail, shutting yourself up in your own house as in a fortress, — a fortress in other respects as impenetrable as that of Danaë, notwithstanding Danae's tower was made of brass."

"You are witty, Marguerite," said Madame de Bellière, tremblingly.

"You always flatter me, Élise. To be brief, however, you are reported to be incorruptible and unapproachable. You see whether they calumniate you or not — But what is it you are musing about while I am speaking to you?"

"I?"

"Yes; you are blushing and are quite silent."

"I was trying," said the marchioness, raising her beautiful eyes, brightened with an indication of approaching anger, — "I was trying to discover to what you, who are so learned in mythological subjects, could have alluded in comparing me to Danaë."

"Ah!" said Marguerite, laughing, "you were trying to guess that?"

"Yes; do you not remember that at the convent, when we were solving our problems in mathematics, — ah! what I have to tell you is learned also, but it is my turn, — do you not remember that if one of the terms were

given we were to find out the other? Therefore do you guess now?"

"I cannot conjecture what you mean."

"And yet nothing is more simple. You pretend that I am in love, do you not?"

"So it is said."

"Very well; it is not said, I suppose, that I am in love with an abstraction. There must surely be a name mentioned in this report."

"Certainly, a name is mentioned."

"Very well, my dear; it is not surprising, then, that I should try to guess that name, since you do not tell it to me."

"My dear marchioness, when I saw you blush, I did not think you would have to spend much time in conjectures."

"It was the word 'Danae' which you used that surprised me. 'Danaë' means a shower of gold, does it not?"

"That is to say that the Jupiter of Danae changed himself into a shower of gold for her."

"My lover, then, — he whom you assign me — "

"Oh, I beg your pardon; I am your friend, and assign you no one."

"That may be; but those who are evilly disposed towards me."

"Do you wish to hear the name?"

"I have been waiting this half-hour for it."

"You shall hear it. Do not be shocked! he is a man high in power."

"Good!" said the marchioness, as she clinched her taper fingers like a patient at the approach of the knife.

"He is a very wealthy man," continued Marguerite; "the wealthiest, it may be. In a word, it is — "

The marchioness closed her eyes for a moment.

"It is the Duke of Buckingham," said Marguerite, bursting into laughter. The perfidiousness had been calculated with extreme ability; the name that was pronounced, instead of the name which the marchioness awaited, had precisely the same effect upon the poor woman as the badly sharpened axes which had hacked without killing Messieurs de Chalais and de Thou on their scaffolds had upon them. She recovered herself, however, and said: "I was perfectly right in calling you a witty woman, for you are making the time pass most agreeably. The joke is a most amusing one, for I have never seen the Duke of Buckingham."

"Never?" said Marguerite, restraining her laughter.

"I have never even left my own house since the duke has been at Paris."

"Oh!" resumed Madame Vanel, stretching out her unruly foot towards a paper which was rustling on the carpet near the window, "it is not necessary for people to see each other, since they can write."

The marchioness trembled, for this paper was the envelope of the letter she was reading as her friend had entered. That envelope was sealed with the superintendent's arms. As she leaned back upon her sofa, Madame de Bellière covered the paper with the thick folds of her flowing silk dress, and so concealed it. Then she said, "Come, Marguerite, was it to tell me all these foolish things that you have come to see me so early in the day?"

"No; I came to see you, in the first place, and to remind you of those habits of our earlier days, so delightful to remember, you know, when we used to wander about together at Vincennes, and sitting beneath an oak or in some coppice used to talk of those whom we loved and who loved us."

"Do you propose that we should go out together now?"

"My carriage is here, and I have three hours at my disposal."

"I am not dressed yet, Marguerite; but if you wish that we should talk together, we can, without going to the woods of Vincennes, find, in my own garden here, beautiful trees, shady hedges, a greensward covered with daisies and violets, the perfume of which can be perceived where we are sitting."

"I regret your refusal, my dear marchioness, for I wanted to pour out my whole heart into yours."

"I repeat again, Marguerite, my heart is yours just as much in this room, or beneath the lime-trees in my garden here, as it is under the oaks in the wood yonder."

"It is not the same thing for me. In approaching nearer to Vincennes, Marchioness, my ardent aspirations approach nearer to that object towards which they have for some days past been directed." The marchioness suddenly raised her head. "Are you surprised, then, that I am still thinking of St. Mandé?"

"Of St. Mandé!" exclaimed Madame de Bellière; and the glances of the two women met each other like two unquiet swords at the beginning of a combat.

"You, so proud too?" said the marchioness, disdainfully.

"I, so proud!" replied Madame Vanel. "Such is my nature. I do not forgive neglect; I cannot endure infidelity. When I leave any one and he weeps, I feel induced still to love him; but when others forsake me and laugh at their infidelity, I love distractedly."

Madame de Bellière could not restrain an involuntary movement.

"She is jealous," said Marguerite to herself.

"Then," continued the marchioness, "you are quite

enamored of the Duke of Buckingham, — I mean of M. Fouquet?" She felt the blow, and all her blood seemed to have flowed towards her heart. "And you wished to go to Vincennes, — to St. Mandé even?"

"I hardly know what I wished; you would have advised me perhaps."

"In what respect?"

"You have often done so."

"Most certainly I should not have done so in the present instance, for I do not forgive as you do. I am less loving, perhaps; but when my heart has been once wounded, it remains so always."

"But M. Fouquet has not wounded you," said Marguerite Vanel, with the most perfect simplicity.

"You perfectly understand what I mean. M. Fouquet has not wounded me; he is not known to me either by any favor or by any injury. But you have reason to complain of him; you are my friend, and I am afraid I should not advise you as you would like."

"Ah! you are prejudging the case."

"The sighs you spoke of just now are more than indications."

"You overwhelm me," said the young woman suddenly, as if collecting her whole strength, like a wrestler preparing for a last struggle; "you take only my wicked passions and my weaknesses into account, and do not speak of the pure and generous feelings which I have. If at this moment I feel attracted towards Monsieur the Superintendent, if I even make an advance to him, — which I confess is very probable, — my motive for it is that M. Fouquet's fate deeply affects me, and that he is, in my opinion, one of the most unfortunate men living."

"Ah!" said the marchioness, placing her hand upon her heart; "something new, then, has occurred?"

"Do you not know it?"

"I do not know anything about him," said Madame de Bellière, with that palpitation of anguish which suspends thought and speech, and even life itself.

"My dear, in the first place, the king's favor is entirely withdrawn from M. Fouquet, and conferred on M. Colbert."

"Yes, so they say."

"It is very clear, since the discovery of the plot at Belle-Isle."

"I was told that the discovery of the fortifications there had turned out to M. Fouquet's honor."

Marguerite began to laugh in so cruel a manner that Madame de Bellière could at that moment have joyfully plunged a dagger in Marguerite's bosom. "Dearest," continued Marguerite, "there is no longer any question of M. Fouquet's honor, his safety is concerned. Before three days are past the ruin of the superintendent will be complete."

"Stay!" said the marchioness, in her turn smiling; "that is going a little too fast."

"I said three days, because I wish to delude myself with a hope; but most certainly the catastrophe is not twenty-four hours distant."

"Why so?"

"For the simplest of all reasons, — that M. Fouquet has no more money."

"In matters of finance, my dear Marguerite, some are without money to-day who to-morrow can procure millions."

"That might be M. Fouquet's case when he had two wealthy and clever friends who amassed money for him and wrung it from every source; but these friends are dead."

"Money does not die, Marguerite: it may be concealed, but it can be looked for; it can be bought or found."

"You see things on the bright side, and so much the better for you. It is really very unfortunate that you are not the Egeria of M. Fouquet, you might show him the source whence he could obtain the millions for which the king asked him yesterday."

"Millions!" said the marchioness, in terror.

"Four, — an even number."

"Infamous!" murmured Madame de Bellière, tortured by that brutal pleasantry. "M. Fouquet, I should think, must certainly have four millions," she replied courageously.

"If he has those which the king requires to-day," said Marguerite, "he will not perhaps possess those which the king will require of him in a month."

"The king will require money from him again?"

"No doubt; and that is my reason for saying that the ruin of this poor M. Fouquet is inevitable. Pride will induce him to furnish the money, and when he has no more he will fall."

"It is true," said the marchioness, tremblingly; "the plan is a bold one. But tell me, does M. Colbert hate M. Fouquet so very much?"

"I think he does not like him. Now, M. de Colbert is powerful: he improves on close acquaintance; he has gigantic ideas, a strong will, and discretion; he will make great strides."

"He will be superintendent?"

"It is probable. Such is the reason, my dear marchioness, why I felt myself impressed in favor of that poor man who once loved, nay, even adored me; and why, when I see him so unfortunate, I forgive his infidelity, which I have reason to believe he also regrets; and why,

moreover, I should not have been disinclined to afford him some consolation or some good advice, — he would have understood the advance, and would have thought kindly of me for it. It is gratifying to be loved, you know. Men value love highly when they are no longer blinded by its influence."

The marchioness, bewildered and overcome by these cruel attacks, which had been calculated with the correctness and precision of aim of a discharge of artillery, hardly knew what answer to return; she even seemed to have lost all power of thought. Her perfidious friend's voice had assumed the most affectionate tone; she spoke as a woman, but concealed the instincts of a panther.

"Well," said Madame de Bellière, who had a vague hope that Marguerite would cease to overwhelm a vanquished enemy, "why do you not go and see M. Fouquet?"

"Decidedly, Marchioness, you have made me reflect. No, it would be unbecoming for me to make the first advance. M. Fouquet no doubt loves me, but he is too proud. I cannot expose myself to an affront, — besides, I have my husband to consider. You say nothing to me. Very well; I shall consult M. Colbert on the subject." And she rose smilingly, as though to take leave, but the marchioness had not the strength to imitate her. Marguerite advanced a few paces, in order that she might continue to enjoy the humiliating grief in which her rival was plunged, and then said suddenly, "You do not accompany me to the door, then?"

The marchioness rose, pale and almost lifeless, without thinking any longer of the envelope, which had occupied her attention so much at the beginning of the conversation, and which was revealed at the first step she took. She then opened the door of her oratory, and without

even turning her head towards Marguerite Vanel, entered it, closing the door after her. Marguerite said, or rather muttered, a few words, which Madame de Bellière did not even hear. As soon, however, as the marchioness had disappeared, her envious enemy, not being able to resist the desire to satisfy herself that her suspicions were well grounded, advanced stealthily like a panther, and seized the envelope. "Ah!" said she, gnashing her teeth, "it was indeed a letter from M. Fouquet that she was reading when I arrived;" and then she too darted out of the room.

During this interval the marchioness, having arrived behind the rampart as it were of her door, felt that her strength was failing her; for a moment she remained rigid, pale, and motionless as a statue, and then, like a statue shaken on its base by a storm of wind, tottered and fell inanimate on the carpet. The noise of the fall resounded just as the rolling of Marguerite's carriage leaving the hotel was heard.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MADAME DE BELLIÈRE'S PLATE.

The blow had been the more painful because it was unexpected. It was some time before the marchioness recovered; but once recovered, she began to reflect upon the events which had been announced to her. She returned, at the risk even of losing her life in that way, to that train of ideas which her relentless friend had forced her to pursue. Treason, then,—dark menaces concealed under the semblance of public interest,—such were Colbert's manœuvres. An invidious delight at an approaching downfall, untiring efforts to attain this object, seductions no less wicked than the crime itself,—these gave occupation to Marguerite. The crooked atoms of Descartes triumphed; to the man without compassion was united a woman without heart. The marchioness perceived, with sorrow rather than with indignation, that the king was an accomplice in a plot which savored of the duplicity of Louis XIII. in his advanced age, and of the avarice of Mazarin at a period of life when he had not had the opportunity of gorging himself with French gold. But the spirit of this courageous woman soon resumed all its energy, and abandoned retrospective lamentation. The marchioness was not one to weep when it was necessary to act, nor to waste time in bewailing a misfortune when there were still means of relieving it. For ten minutes or more she buried her face in her icy hands, and then, raising her head, rang for her attendants with a

steady hand and with a gesture full of energy. Her resolution was taken.

"Is everything prepared for my departure?" she inquired of one of her maids who entered.

"Yes, Madame; but it was not expected that your Ladyship would leave for Bellière for the next few days."

"All my jewels and articles of value, however, are locked up?"

"Yes, Madame; but hitherto we have been in the habit of leaving them in Paris. Your Ladyship does not generally take your jewels with you into the country."

"But they are all in order, you say?"

"Yes, in your Ladyship's own room."

"The gold plate?"

"In the chest."

"And the silver plate?"

"In the large oaken closet."

The marchioness was silent, and then said calmly, "Let my goldsmith be sent for."

Her attendants vanished to execute the order. The marchioness, however, entered her own room, and inspected her casket of jewels with the greatest attention. Never until now had she bestowed so much attention upon valuables in which women take so much pride; never until now had she looked at her jewels, except for the purpose of making a selection according to the settings or their colors. On this occasion, however, she admired the size of the rubies and the brilliancy of the diamonds; she grieved over every blemish and every defect; she thought the gold light, and the stones wretched.

The goldsmith, as he entered, found the marchioness thus occupied. "M. Faucheux," she said, "I believe that you supplied me with my gold service?"

"Yes, Madame the Marchioness."

"I do not now remember the amount of the bill."

"Of the new service, Madame, or of that which M de Bellière presented to you on your marriage? — for I furnished both."

"Well, first of all, the new one."

"Madame, the ewers, the goblets, and the dishes, with their covers, the *epergne*, the ice-pails, the dishes for the preserves, and the urns cost your Ladyship sixty thousand livres."

"*Mon Dieu!* No more?"

"Your Ladyship thought my bill very large."

"Yes, yes. I remember, in fact, that it was dear, but it was the workmanship, I suppose?"

"Yes, Madame; the designs, the chasings, and new patterns."

"What proportion of the cost does the workmanship form? Do not hesitate to tell me."

"A third of its value, Madame. But — "

"There is the other service, — the old one, that which belonged to my husband?"

"Yes, Madame; there is less workmanship in that than in the one I just mentioned. Its intrinsic value does not exceed thirty thousand livres."

"Seventy thousand," murmured the marchioness; "but, M. Faucheux, there is also the silver service which belonged to my mother, — all that massive plate, you know, which I did not wish to part with on account of the associations connected with it."

"Ah! Madame, that would indeed be an excellent resource for those who, unlike your Ladyship, might not be in a position to keep their plate. At that time, Madame, they made nothing light as they do to-day. In working that, they worked in solid metal. But that

service is no longer in fashion. Its weight is its only advantage."

"That is all I care about. How much does it weigh?"

"Fifty thousand livres at the very least. I do not allude to the enormous vases for the buffet, each of which weighs five thousand livres, or both of them ten thousand."

"One hundred and thirty," murmured the marchioness "You are quite sure of your figures, M. Faucheux?"

"Positive, Madame. Besides, there is no difficulty in weighing them."

"The amount is entered on my books."

"Your Ladyship is extremely methodical, I am aware."

"Let us now turn to another subject," said Madame de Bellière; and she opened one of her jewel-boxes.

"I recognize these emeralds," said the dealer, "for it was I who had the setting of them. They are the most beautiful in the whole court. No, I am mistaken. Madame de Châtillon has the most beautiful set, she had them from Messieurs de Guise. but your set, Madame, are next."

"What are they worth?"

"Mounted?"

"No; supposing I wished to sell them."

"I know very well who would buy them," exclaimed M. Faucheux.

"That is the very thing I ask. They would be purchased, then?"

"All your jewels would be bought, Madame. It is well known that you possess the most beautiful jewels in Paris. You are not changeable in your tastes; when you make a purchase it is of the very best, and what you purchase you do not part with."

"What could these emeralds be sold for, then?"

"A hundred and thirty thousand livres."

The marchioness wrote down upon her tablets with a pencil the amount which the jeweller mentioned. "This ruby necklace?" she said.

"Are they balas rubies, Madame?"

"Here they are."

"They are beautiful, magnificent. I did not know you had these stones, Madame."

"What is their value?"

"Two hundred thousand livres. The stone in the centre is alone worth a hundred."

"Yes, yes, that is what I thought," said the marchioness. "As for diamonds, I have them in great numbers, — rings, necklaces, pendants, sprigs, ear-rings, clasps. Tell me their value, M. Faucheux."

The jeweller took his magnifying-glass and scales, weighed and inspected them, and then silently made his calculations. "These stones," he said, "must have cost your Ladyship an income of forty thousand livres."

"You value them at eight hundred thousand livres?"

"Nearly so."

"It is about what I imagined; but the settings are not included."

"As is usual, Madame; but if I were called upon to sell or to buy, I should be satisfied with the gold of the settings alone as my profit upon the transaction. I should make a good twenty-five thousand livres."

"An agreeable sum."

"Yes, Madame, very agreeable."

"Will you accept that profit, then, on condition of converting the jewels into money?"

"But you do not intend to sell your diamonds, I suppose, Madame?" exclaimed the bewildered jeweller.

"Silence, M. Faucheux! Do not disturb yourself about

that; give me an answer simply. You are an honorable man, with whom my family has dealt for thirty years, you have known my father and mother, whom your own father and mother had served. I address you as a friend; will you accept the gold of the settings in return for a sum of ready money to be placed in my hands?"

"Eight hundred thousand livres! it is enormous."

"I know it."

"It will be impossible to find it."

"Oh, I trust not!"

"But think, Madame, of the effect which will be produced in society by the report of the sale of your jewels."

"No one need know it. You can get sets of false jewels made for me similar to the real. Do not answer a word; I insist upon it. Sell them separately; sell the stones only!"

"In that way it is easy. Monsieur is looking out for some sets of jewels as well as single stones, for Madame's toilet. There will be a competition for them. I can easily dispose of six hundred thousand livres' worth to Monsieur. I am certain yours are the most beautiful."

"When can you do so?"

"Within three days."

"Very well, the remainder you will dispose of among private individuals. For the present make me out a contract of sale, payment to be made in four days."

"Madame, Madame, reflect, I entreat you; if you force the sale, you will lose a hundred thousand livres."

"If necessary, I will lose two hundred; I wish everything to be settled this evening. Do you accept?"

"I do, Madame the Marchioness. I will not conceal from you that I shall make five thousand pistoles by the transaction."

"So much the better. In what way shall I have the money?"

"Either in gold, or in bills of the Bank of Lyons, payable at M. Colbert's."

"I agree," said the marchioness, eagerly; "return home and bring the sum in question in notes, as soon as possible, do you understand?"

"Yes, Madame, but for Heaven's sake —"

"Not a word, M. Fauchcux! By the by, I was forgetting the silver plate. What is the value of that which I have?"

"Fifty thousand livres, Madame."

"That makes a million," said the marchioness to herself. "M. Fauchcux, you will take away with you both the gold and the silver plate. I can assign, as a pretext, that I wish it remodelled for patterns more in accordance with my own taste. Melt it down, I say, and return me its value in gold at once."

"It shall be done, Madame the Marchioness."

"You will be good enough to place the money in a chest, and direct one of your clerks to accompany the chest, and without my servants seeing him; and direct him also to wait for me in a carriage."

"In Madame de Fauchcux's carriage?" said the jeweller.

"If you will allow it; and I will call for it at your house."

"Certainly, Madame the Marchioness."

"I will direct three of my servants to convey the plate to your house." The marchioness rang. "Let the small van be placed at M. Fauchcux's disposal," she said.

The jeweller bowed and left the house, directing that the van should follow him closely, saying aloud that the marchioness was about to have her plate melted down in

order to have other plate manufactured of a more modern style.

Three hours afterwards the marchioness went to M. Faucheux's house, and received from him eight hundred thousand livres in bills on the Bank of Lyons, and two hundred and fifty thousand livres in gold enclosed in a chest, which one of the clerks could hardly carry to Madame Faucheux's carriage, — for Madame Faucheux kept her carriage. As the daughter of a president of accounts, she had brought a marriage portion of thirty thousand crowns to her husband, who was syndic of the goldsmiths. These thirty thousand crowns had become very fruitful during twenty years.

The jeweller, though a millionnaire, was a modest man. He had purchased a venerable carriage, built in 1648, ten years after the king's birth. This carriage, or rather house upon wheels, excited the admiration of the whole quarter; it was covered with allegorical paintings, and with clouds scattered over with stars of gold and silver gilt.

The noble lady entered this somewhat grotesque vehicle, sitting opposite to the clerk, who endeavored to put his knees out of the way, afraid even of touching the marchioness's dress. It was the clerk, too, who told the coachman, who was very proud of having a marchioness to drive, to take the road to St. Mandé.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE DOWRY.

M. Faucheux's horses were respectable Percheron animals, with thick knees and legs which they had some difficulty in moving. Like the carriage, they dated from the earlier part of the century. They were not as fleet, therefore, as M. Fouquet's English horses, and consequently covered two hours in going to St. Mandé. Their progress, it might be said, was majestic. Majesty, however, precludes hurry.

The marchioness stopped the carriage before a door well known to her, although she had seen it only once, under circumstances, it will be remembered, no less painful than that which brought her to it again on this second occasion. She drew a key from her pocket, and inserted it in the lock with her small white hand, pushed open the door, which noiselessly yielded to her touch, and directed the clerk to carry the chest upstairs to the first floor. The weight of the chest was so great that the clerk was obliged to get the coachman to assist him with it. They placed it in a small cabinet, anteroom, or boudoir rather, adjoining the salon where we once saw M. Fouquet at the marchioness's feet. Madame de Bellière gave the coachman a louis, and the clerk a charming smile, and dismissed them both. She closed the door after them, and waited thus, alone and shut in. There was no servant to be seen about the rooms, but everything was prepared as though some invisible genius had divined the wishes and

desires of the guest who was expected. The fire was laid; there were candles in the candelabra, refreshments upon the sideboard, books upon the tables, and fresh-cut flowers in Japanese vases. One might almost have declared it to be an enchanted house.

The marchioness lighted the candles, inhaled the perfume of the flowers, sat down, and was soon plunged in profound revery. Her deep musings, however, melancholy though they were, were not untinged with a certain sweetness. She saw displayed before her in that room a treasure, — a million which she had wrung from her fortune as a gleaner plucks the blue cornflower from her crown of flowers. She conjured up the sweetest dreams. Her principal thought, and one that took precedence of all others, was to devise means of leaving this money for M. Fouquet without his possibly learning from whom the gift had come. This idea naturally enough was the first to present itself to her mind; but although on reflection it appeared difficult to carry out, she did not despair of success. She would, then, ring to summon M. Fouquet, and make her escape, happier than if, instead of having given a million, she had herself found it. But being there, and having seen the boudoir so coquettishly decorated that it might almost be said that the last particle of dust had but the moment before been removed by the servants; having observed the drawing-room so perfectly arranged that it might almost be said that her presence there had driven away the fairies who were its occupants, — she asked herself if the glance or gaze of those whom she had driven away — whether spirits, fairies, elves, or human creatures — had not already recognized her. In that case Fouquet would know all; what he might not know, he would guess: he would refuse to accept as a gift what he might perhaps have accepted under the name of

a loan, and thus the enterprise would end in failure. To secure success, it was necessary, then, that some steps should be seriously taken; and it was necessary, also, that the superintendent should comprehend the seriousness of his position, in order to yield compliance with the generous caprice of a woman. All the fascinations of an eloquent friendship would be required to persuade him; and should this be insufficient, all the intoxicating influence of an ardent love, which in its resolute determination to carry conviction nothing would turn aside. Was not the superintendent, indeed, known for his delicacy and dignity of feeling? Would he allow himself to accept from any woman that of which she had robbed herself? No, he would resist; and if any voice in the world could overcome his resistance, it would be the voice of the woman he loved.

Another doubt, and that a cruel one, suggested itself to Madame de Bellière with a sharp, acute pain, like a dagger-thrust. Did he really love her? Would that volatile mind, that inconstant heart, be likely to be fixed for a moment, even were it to gaze upon an angel? Was it not with Fouquet, notwithstanding his genius and his uprightness of conduct, as with those conquerors on the field of battle who shed tears when they have gained a victory? "I must learn whether it be so, and must judge of that for myself," said the marchioness. "Who can tell whether that heart, so coveted, is not common in its impulses and full of alloy? Who can tell whether that mind, when the touchstone is applied to it, will not be found of a mean and vulgar character? Come, come!" she exclaimed; "this is doubting and hesitating too much. To the proof!" She looked at the timepiece. "It is now seven o'clock," she said; "he must have arrived: it is the hour for signing his papers. Now,

then!" And rising with a feverish impatience, she walked to the mirror, into which she smiled with a resolute smile of devotion. She touched the spring and drew out the handle of the bell; then, as if exhausted beforehand by the struggle which she had just undergone, she threw herself in utter abandonment upon her knees before a large couch, and buried her face in her trembling hands. Ten minutes afterward she heard the spring of the door grate.

The door moved upon its invisible hinges, and Fouquet appeared. He looked pale, and seemed bowed down by the weight of some bitter reflection. He did not hurry, but simply came at the summons. The preoccupation of his mind must indeed have been very great, since, devotee of pleasure as he was, he obeyed such a summons so listlessly. The previous night, in fact, fertile in melancholy ideas, had sharpened his features, generally so noble in their indifference of expression, and had traced dark lines around his eyes. Handsome and noble he still was; and the melancholy expression of his mouth — an expression so rare with him — gave a new character to his countenance, by which his youth seemed to be renewed. Dressed in black, the lace on his breast all disarranged by his restless hand, the superintendent fixed his eyes, full of reverie, upon the threshold of the room which he had so frequently approached in search of expected happiness. This gloomy gentleness of manner, this smiling sadness of expression, which had replaced his former excessive joy, produced an indescribable effect upon Madame de Bellière, who was regarding him at a distance.

A woman's eye can read the face of the man she loves, — its every feeling of pride, its every expression of suffering; it might almost be said that Heaven has gra-

ciously accorded to women, by reason of their very weakness, more than is granted to other creatures. They can conceal their own feelings from a man, but from them no man can conceal his. The marchioness divined in a single glance all the unhappiness of the superintendent. She divined a night passed without sleep, a day passed in disappointments. From that moment she was firm in her own strength, and she felt that she loved Fouquet beyond everything else. She rose and approached him, saying, "You wrote to me this morning to say that you were beginning to forget me, and that I, whom you had not seen lately, had no doubt ceased to think of you. I have come to undeceive you, Monsieur, and the more completely so, because there is one thing I can read in your eyes."

"What is that, Madame?" asked Fouquet, astonished.

"That is, that you have never loved me so much as at this moment, in the same manner you can read, in my present step towards you, that I have not forgotten you."

"Oh, Marchioness," said Fouquet, whose noble face was for a moment lighted up by a sudden gleam of joy, "you are indeed an angel, and no man can suspect you. All he can do is to humble himself before you and entreat forgiveness."

"Your forgiveness is granted, then." Fouquet was about to throw himself upon his knees. "No, no!" she said; "sit here, by my side. Ah, that is an evil thought which has just crossed your mind!"

"How do you detect it, Madame?"

"By your smile, which has just injured the expression of your countenance. Be candid, and tell me what your thought was. No secrets between friends!"

"Tell me, then, Madame, why have you been so harsh for these three or four months past?"

"Harsh?"

"Yes; did you not forbid me to visit you?"

"Alas! my friend," said Madame de Bellière, sighing deeply, "it is because your visit to me caused you a great misfortune; because my house is watched; because the same eyes which have already seen you might see you again; because I think it less dangerous for you that I should come here than that you should come to my house; in short, because I find you so unhappy that I am not willing to add to your misfortunes."

Fouquet started; for these words recalled all the anxieties connected with his office of superintendent, — to him who for the last few minutes had entertained only the hopes of the lover. "I unhappy?" he said, endeavoring to smile; "indeed, Marchioness, you will almost make me believe that I am so, by your own sadness. Are those beautiful eyes raised upon me merely in pity? Oh, I am hoping for another expression from them!"

"It is not I who am sad, Monsieur. Look in the mirror there! It is you who are so."

"It is true that I am somewhat pale, Marchioness, but it is from overwork. The king yesterday required a supply of money from me."

"Yes, — four millions; I know that."

"You know it?" exclaimed Fouquet, surprised; "and how do you know it? It was only at the card-party, after the departure of the queen, and in the presence of one person only, that the king — "

"You perceive that I do know it, is not that sufficient? Well, go on, Monsieur! The money the king has required you to supply — "

"You understand, Marchioness, that I have been obliged to procure it, then to get it counted, afterwards registered, — altogether a long affair. Since M. de

Mazarin's death, financial affairs occasion some little fatigue and embarrassment. My administration is somewhat overtaxed, and that is the reason why I have not slept during the past night."

"Then you have the amount?" inquired the marchioness, with some anxiety.

"It would indeed be strange, Marchioness," replied Fouquet, cheerfully, "if a superintendent of finances were not to have a paltry four millions in his coffers."

"Yes, yes, I believe you either have or will have them."

"What do you mean by saying that I shall have them?"

"It is not very long since you were required to furnish two millions."

"On the contrary, to me it seems almost an age, Marchioness; but do not let us talk of money matters any longer, if you please."

"On the contrary, we will continue to speak of them, for that is my only reason for coming to see you."

"I am at a loss to know your meaning," said the superintendent, whose eyes began to express an anxious curiosity.

"Tell me, Monsieur, is the office of superintendent an irremovable one?"

"You surprise me, Marchioness, for you speak as if you had an interest in the business."

"My reason is simple enough. I am desirous of placing some money in your hands, and naturally I wish to know whether you are certain of your post."

"Really, Marchioness, I am at a loss what to reply, and I cannot conceive your meaning."

"Seriously, then, my dear M. Fouquet, I have certain funds which somewhat embarrass me. I am tired of investing my money in land, and am anxious to give it in charge to some friend who will turn it to account."

"Surely the matter is not pressing," said M. Fouquet.

"On the contrary, it is very pressing."

"Very well, we will talk of that by and by."

"By and by will not do, for my money is there," returned the marchioness, pointing out the coffer to the superintendent, and showing him, as she opened it, the bundles of notes and heaps of gold.

Fouquet, who had risen from his seat at the same moment as Madame de Bellière, remained for a moment plunged in thought; then, suddenly starting back, he turned pale, and sank down in his chair, concealing his face in his hands. "Marchioness, Marchioness," he murmured, "what opinion can you have of me when you make me such an offer?"

"Of you!" returned the marchioness. "Tell me, rather, what you yourself think of it."

"You bring me this money for myself, and you bring it because you know me to be embarrassed. Nay, do not deny it, for I am sure of it. Do I not know your heart?"

"If you know my heart, then, can you not see that it is my heart which I offer you?"

"I have guessed rightly, then!" exclaimed Fouquet. "In truth, Madame, I have never yet given you the right to insult me in this manner."

"Insult you!" she said, turning pale; "what singular delicacy of feeling! You love me, you have said. In the name of that love you have asked me to sacrifice my reputation and my honor; yet when I offer you my money, which is my own, you refuse me."

"Marchioness, you were at liberty to preserve what you term your reputation and your honor. Allow me the liberty of preserving mine. Leave me to my ruin, — leave me to sink beneath the weight of the hatreds which sur-

round me, beneath the faults I have committed, beneath the load even of my remorse; but, for Heaven's sake, Marchioness, do not crush me under this last infliction."

"A short time ago, M. Fouquet, you were wanting in judgment, now you are wanting in feeling."

Fouquet pressed his clinched hand upon his heaving breast, saying, "Overwhelm me, Madame! I have nothing to reply."

"I offered you my friendship, M. Fouquet."

"Yes, Madame, but you limited yourself to that."

"And what I am now doing is the act of a friend."

"No doubt it is."

"And you reject this mark of my friendship?"

"I do reject it."

"M. Fouquet, look at me!" said the marchioness, with glistening eyes; "I now offer you my love."

"Oh, Madame!" exclaimed Fouquet.

"I have loved you for a long while past: women, like men, have a false delicacy at times. For a long time past I have loved you, but would not confess it."

"Oh!" said Fouquet, clasping his hands.

"Well, then, you have implored this love on your knees, and I have refused you. I was blind, as you were a little while since, but as it was my love that you sought, it is my love that I now offer you."

"Yes, your love, but your love only."

"My love, my person, my life! All, all, all!"

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed Fouquet, dazzled.

"Do you wish my love?"

"Oh, you overwhelm me beneath the weight of my happiness!"

"Will you be happy, then, if I am yours, — yours entirely?"

"It will be the supremest happiness for me."

"Take me, then! If, however, for your sake I sacrifice a prejudice, do you, for mine, sacrifice a scruple."

"Madame, Madame, do not tempt me!"

"My friend, my friend, do not refuse me."

"Think seriously of what you are proposing"

"Fouquet, but one word! Let it be 'No,' and I open this door," — and she pointed to that which led into the street, — "and you will never see me again. Let that word be 'Yes,' and I am yours entirely."

"Élise! Élise! But this coffer?"

"It contains my dowry."

"It is your ruin!" exclaimed Fouquet, turning over the gold and papers, "there must be a million here"

"Yes, — my jewels, for which I care no longer if you do not love me, and for which, equally, I care no longer if you love me as I love you."

"This is too much!" exclaimed Fouquet. "I yield, I yield, even were it only to consecrate such devotion. I accept the dowry."

"And take the woman with it," said the marchioness, throwing herself into his arms.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

GOD'S TERRITORY.

During the progress of these events Buckingham and De Wardes were travelling like boon companions, and made the journey from Paris to Calais in perfect harmony. Buckingham had hurried his departure, so that the best part of his adieux were very hastily made. His visit to Monsieur and Madame, to the young queen and to the queen-dowager, had been paid collectively, — a precaution on the part of the queen-mother, which saved him the distress of any further private conversation with Monsieur, and saved him also from the danger of seeing Madame again. Buckingham embraced De Guiche and Raoul; he assured the former of his high regard for him, and the latter of a firm friendship capable of triumphing over all obstacles and remaining unshaken by distance or lapse of time. The carriages containing the luggage had already been sent on ahead, and in the evening he set off in his travelling-carriage with his attendants.

De Wardes, irritated at finding himself dragged away in tow, so to speak, by this Englishman, had sought in his subtle mind for some means of escaping from his fetters; but no one having rendered him any assistance, he was absolutely obliged to endure the burden of his own evil thoughts and of his own caustic spirit.

Those of his friends in whom he had been able to confide had, in their character of wits, rallied him upon the duke's superiority. Others, less brilliant but more sensi-

ble, had reminded him of the king's orders, which prohibited duelling. Others, again, — and they the larger number, — who from Christian charity or national vanity might have rendered him assistance, did not care to run the risk of incurring disgrace, and would, at the best, have informed the ministers of a departure which might end in a massacre on a small scale. The result was that after having fully deliberated upon the matter, De Wardes packed up his luggage, took a couple of horses, and, followed only by one servant, made his way towards the barrier, where Buckingham's carriage was to await him.

The duke received his adversary as he would have received an intimate acquaintance, made room beside him on the same seat with himself, offered him sweetmeats, and spread over his knees the sable cloak which had been thrown upon the front seat. They then conversed of the court, without alluding to Madame, of Monsieur, without speaking of his domestic affairs; of the king, without speaking of his brother's wife, of the queen-mother, without alluding to her daughter-in law; of the King of England, without alluding to his sister; of the state of the affections of each of the travellers, without pronouncing any name that might be dangerous.

In this way the journey, which was performed by short stages, was most agreeable, and Buckingham, almost a Frenchman in wit and education, was delighted at having so admirably selected his travelling companion. Elegant repasts, of which they partook but lightly; trials of horses in the beautiful meadows which skirted the road; coursing, — for Buckingham had his greyhounds with him, — in such employments did they pass away the time. The duke somewhat resembled the beautiful river Seine, which encloses France a thousand times in its loving embraces before deciding to join its waters with the ocean. But in

quitting France, it was her recently adopted daughter whom he had brought to Paris that he chiefly regretted; his every thought was a remembrance of her, and consequently a regret. Therefore, whenever now and then, despite his command over himself, he was lost in thought, De Wardes left him entirely to his musings.

This delicacy would certainly have touched Buckingham and changed his feelings towards De Wardes, if the latter, while preserving silence, had shown a glance less full of malice and a smile less false. Instinctive dislikes, however, are relentless, — nothing appeases them; a few ashes may sometimes cover them up, but beneath those ashes the smothered flames rage more furiously. After having exhausted all the means of amusement which the route offered, they arrived, as we have said, at Calais towards the end of the sixth day. The duke's attendants had arrived the evening before, and had chartered a boat for the purpose of joining the yacht, which had been tacking about in sight, or lying broadside on, whenever it felt its white wings wearied, within two or three cannon-shots from the jetty.

The boat was destined for the transport of the duke's equipment from the shore to the yacht. The horses had been shipped, having been hoisted from the boat upon the deck of the vessel in baskets, expressly made for the purpose, and wadded in such a manner that their limbs, even in the most violent fits of terror or impatience, were always protected by the soft support which the sides afforded, and not a hair was turned. Eight of these baskets, placed side by side, filled the ship's hold. It is well known that in short voyages horses, with the best of food before them, such as they would have coveted on land, refuse to eat, but remain trembling all the while.

By degrees the duke's entire equipage was transported

on board the yacht. His men then came to inform him that everything was in readiness, and that they only waited for him, whenever he would be disposed to embark with the French gentleman; for no one supposed that the French gentleman would have any other accounts to settle with my Lord Duke than those of friendship. Buckingham desired the captain of the yacht to be told to hold himself in readiness, but that, as the sea was beautiful, and as the day promised a splendid sunset, he did not intend to go on board until nightfall, and would avail himself of the evening to enjoy a walk on the strand. He added, also, that, finding himself in such excellent company, he had not the least desire to hasten his embarkation.

As he said this, he pointed out to those who surrounded him the magnificent spectacle which the sky presented, of a deep purple color in the horizon, and an amphitheatre of fleecy clouds ascending from the sun's disk to the zenith, assuming the appearance of a range of mountains whose summits were heaped one upon another. The whole amphitheatre was tinged at its base by a kind of blood-like foam, fading away towards the summit into opal and pearl-like tints The sea, too, was tinged with the same reflection, and upon the crest of every azure wave danced a point of light, like a ruby exposed to the reflection of a lamp. The mildness of the evening; the smell of the sea, so dear to contemplative minds; a stiff breeze setting in from the east and blowing in harmonious gusts; in the distance the black outline of the yacht with its rigging traced upon the empurpled background of the sky; here and there on the horizon lateen-sails bending over the blue sea, like the wings of a sea-gull about to plunge, — all contributed to a spectacle which indeed well merited admiration.

A crowd of curious idlers followed the richly dressed attendants, among whom they mistook the steward and the secretary for the master and his friend. Buckingham, dressed very simply in a gray satin vest and doublet of violet-colored velvet, wearing his hat drawn over his eyes, and without orders or embroidery, was taken no more notice of than was De Wardes, who was dressed in black like an attorney.

The duke's attendants had received directions to keep a boat in readiness at the jetty-head, and to watch the embarkation of their master, without approaching him until either he or his friend should summon them, — "whatever may happen," he had added, laying a stress upon these words, so that they might not be misunderstood.

Having walked a few paces upon the strand, Buckingham said to De Wardes: "I think, Monsieur, it is now time to take leave of each other. The tide, you perceive, is rising; ten minutes hence it will have soaked the sands where we are now walking in such a manner that we shall not be able to keep our footing."

"I await your orders, my Lord, but — "

"But, you mean, we are still upon the king's soil."

"Exactly."

"Well, do you see yonder a kind of little island surrounded by a circular pool of water? The pool is increasing every minute, and the isle is gradually disappearing. This island, indeed, belongs to God; for it is situated between two seas, and is not shown on the king's maps. Do you observe it?"

"Yes; but we can hardly reach it now without getting our feet wet."

"Yes; but observe that it forms an eminence tolerably high, and that the tide rises on every side, leaving

the top free. We shall be admirably placed upon that little theatre. What do you think of it?"

"I shall be perfectly happy wherever my sword may have the honor of crossing your Lordship's."

"Very well, then. I am distressed to be the cause of your wetting your feet, M. de Wardes; but it is most essential, I think, that you should be able to say to the king, 'Sire, I did not fight upon your Majesty's territory.' Perhaps the distinction is somewhat subtle; but since Port-Royal you abound in subtleties of expression. Do not let us complain of this, however, for it makes your wit very brilliant, and of a style peculiarly your own. If you do not object, we will hurry, M. de Wardes; for the sea, I perceive, is rising fast, and night is setting in."

"My reason for not walking faster, my Lord, was that I did not wish to precede your Grace. Are you still on dry land, my Lord Duke?"

"Yes, just at present. Look yonder! my servants are afraid that we shall be drowned, and have converted the boat into a cruiser. Do you see how curiously it dances upon the crests of the waves? But as it makes me feel sea-sick, would you permit me to turn my back towards them?"

"You will observe, my Lord, that in turning your back to them you will have the sun full in your face."

"Oh, its rays are very feeble at this hour, and it will soon have disappeared. Do not be uneasy at that!"

"As you please, my Lord. It was out of consideration for your Lordship that I made the remark."

"I am aware of that, M. de Wardes, and I appreciate your kindness. Shall we take off our doublets?"

"As you please, my Lord."

"It is more convenient."

"Then I am all ready."

"Do not hesitate to tell me, M. de Wardes, if you do not feel comfortable upon the wet sand, or if you think yourself a little too close to the French territory. We could fight in England, or else upon my yacht."

"We are exceedingly well placed here, my Lord; only I have the honor to remark that, as the sea is rising fast, we have hardly time —"

Buckingham made a sign of assent, took off his doublet, and threw it on the sand. De Wardes did likewise. Both their bodies — white, like two phantoms, to those who were looking at them from the shore — were thrown strongly into relief by a reddish-violet shadow with which the sky became overspread

"Upon my word, Monsieur the Duke," said De Wardes, "we shall hardly have time to begin. Do you not perceive how our feet are sinking into the sand?"

"I have sunk up to the ankles," said Buckingham, "without reckoning that the water is still rising upon us."

"It has already reached me. As soon as you please, therefore, Monsieur the Duke," said De Wardes; and he drew his sword, — a movement imitated by the duke.

"M. de Wardes," then said Buckingham, "one final word, if you please. I am about to fight you because I do not like you, — because you have wounded me in ridiculing a certain passion which I have entertained, and one which I acknowledge that at this moment I still retain, and for which I would very willingly die. You are a wicked man, M. de Wardes, and I will do my utmost to take your life; for I feel assured that if you survive this engagement, you will in the future work great mischief to my friends. That is all I have to say to you, M. de Wardes," and Buckingham saluted.

"And I, my Lord, have only this to reply to you: I have not disliked you hitherto; but now that you have divined my character I hate you, and will do all I can to kill you;" and De Wardes saluted Buckingham.

Their swords crossed at the same moment, like two flashes of lightning meeting in a dark night. The swords seemed to seek each other and feel their way to contact. Both were practised swordsmen, and the earlier passes were without any result. The night was fast closing in, and it was so dark that they attacked and defended themselves almost instinctively. Suddenly De Wardes felt his sword arrested; he had just touched Buckingham's shoulder.

The duke's sword sank, as his arm was lowered. "Oh!" said he.

"You are touched, my Lord," said De Wardes, drawing back a step or two.

"Yes, Monsieur, but only slightly."

"Yet you quitted your guard."

"Only from the first effect of the cold steel, but I have recovered. Let us go on, if you please, Monsieur;" and disengaging his sword with a sinister clashing of the blade, the duke wounded De Wardes in the breast.

"Touched also," he said.

"No," said De Wardes, standing firm in his place.

"I beg your pardon; but seeing your shirt all red —" said Buckingham.

"Well," said De Wardes, furiously, "it is now your turn;" and with a terrible lunge he pierced Buckingham's fore-arm, the sword passing between the two bones.

Buckingham, feeling his right arm paralyzed, stretched out his left arm, seized his sword, which was about falling from his nerveless grasp, and before De Wardes could resume his guard, thrust it through his breast.

De Wardes tottered, his knees gave way beneath him, and leaving his sword still fixed in the duke's arm, he fell into the water, which was soon crimsoned with a more genuine stain than that which it had taken from the clouds. De Wardes was not dead, he felt the terrible danger with which he was menaced, for the sea was rising. The duke, too, perceived the danger. With an effort, and an exclamation of pain, he tore out the blade which had remained in his arm, and turning to De Wardes, said, "Are you dead, Monsieur?"

"No," replied De Wardes, in a voice choked by the blood which rushed from his lungs to his throat, "but very near it."

"Well, what is to be done? Let us see; can you walk?" said Buckingham, supporting him on his knee.

"Impossible," said De Wardes; then falling back again, he said, "Call to your people, or I shall be drowned."

"Halloa!" shouted Buckingham, "boat there! quick, quick!"

The boat flew over the waves, but the sea rose faster than the boat could approach Buckingham saw that De Wardes was on the point of being again covered by a wave; he passed his left arm, safe and unwounded, round De Wardes's body, and raised him up. The wave ascended to the duke's waist, but could not move him. He immediately began to walk towards the shore. He had hardly gone ten paces when a second wave, rushing onwards, — higher, more menacing, more furious, than the former, — struck him at the height of his chest, threw him over, and buried him beneath the water. At the reflux, however, the duke and De Wardes were discovered lying on the sand. De Wardes had fainted. At this moment four of the duke's sailors, who comprehended the danger,


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threw themselves into the sea, and in a moment were close beside him. Their terror was extreme when they observed that their master became covered with blood in proportion as the water with which it was impregnated flowed towards his knees and feet. They wished to carry him away.

"No, no!" exclaimed the duke; "take M. de Wardes on shore first."

"Death to the Frenchman!" cried the English, sullenly.

"Wretched knaves!" exclaimed the duke, drawing himself up with a haughty gesture, which sprinkled them with blood, "obey directly! M. de Wardes on shore! M. de Wardes's safety to be looked to first, or I will have you all hanged!"

The boat had by this time reached them; the secretary and the steward in their turn leaped into the sea, and approached De Wardes, who no longer showed any sign of life.

"I commit this man to your care as you value your lives," said the duke. "Take M. de Wardes on shore!" They took him in their arms, and carried him to the dry sand, which the tide never reached. A few idlers and five or six fishermen had gathered on the shore, attracted by the strange spectacle of two men fighting with the water up to their knees. The fishermen, observing a group of men approaching carrying a wounded man, themselves entered the sea until the water was up to their waists. The English transferred the wounded man to them at the very moment the latter began to open his eyes again. The salt water and the fine sand had got into his wounds, and caused him unspeakable suffering.

The duke's secretary drew from his pocket a filled purse, and handed it to the one among those present

who appeared of most importance, saying, "From my master, his Grace the Duke of Buckingham, in order that every conceivable care may be taken of M. de Wardes." Then, followed by his men, he returned to the boat, which Buckingham had been enabled to reach with the greatest difficulty, after he had seen De Wardes out of danger By this time it was high tide. The embroidered coats and silk sashes were lost , many hats, too, had been carried away by the waves. The flow of the tide had borne the duke's and De Wardes's clothes to the shore; and De Wardes was wrapped in the duke's doublet, under the belief that it was his own, and they carried him in their arms towards the town.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THREEFOLD LOVE.

As soon as Buckingham had gone, De Guiche imagined that the field would be open to him without a rival Monsieur, who no longer retained the slightest feeling of jealousy, and who besides permitted himself to be monopolized by the Chevalier de Lorraine, allowed as much liberty in his house as the most exacting person could desire. The king, on his side, who had conceived a taste for Madame's society, invented entertainment upon entertainment in order to enliven her residence in Paris, so that not a day passed without a ball at the Palais-Royal or a reception in Monsieur's apartments. The king had directed that Fontainebleau should be prepared for the reception of the court, and every one was using his utmost interest to get invited.

Madame led a life of incessant occupation; neither her voice nor her pen was idle for a moment. The conversations with De Guiche were gradually assuming an interest which might be recognized as the prelude of a deep-seated attachment. When eyes look languishingly while the subject under discussion happens to be the colors of materials for dresses; when a whole hour is occupied in analyzing the merits and the perfume of a sachet or a flower, — in this style of conversation there are words to which every one might listen, but there are gestures and sighs which every one is not allowed to perceive. After Madame had talked for some time with M. de

Guiche, she conversed with the king, who paid her a visit regularly every day. They played, wrote verses, or selected mottoes and emblematical devices. That spring was not only the spring-time of Nature; it was the youth of an entire people, of which those at court were the head. The king was handsome, young, and of unequalled gallantry. All women were passionately loved by him, even the queen his wife. This great king was, however, more timid and more reserved than any other person in the kingdom, — to such a degree, indeed, that he had not confessed his sentiments even to himself. This timidity of bearing restrained him within the limits of ordinary politeness, and no woman could boast of having received preference beyond another. It might be foretold that the day when his real character would be displayed would be the dawn of a new sovereignty, but as yet he had not declared himself. M. de Guiche took advantage of this to constitute himself the sovereign prince of the whole court of love. It had been reported that he was on the best of terms with Mademoiselle de Montalais; that he had been assiduously attentive to Mademoiselle de Châtillon; but now he was not even barely civil to any of the court beauties. He had eyes and ears but for one person alone. In this manner, and as it were without design, he resumed his place with Monsieur, who had a great regard for him, and kept him as much as possible in his own apartments. Unsociable from natural disposition, he was too reserved before the arrival of Madame, but after her arrival he was not reserved enough.

This conduct, which every one had observed, had been particularly remarked by the evil genius of the house, the Chevalier de Lorraine, for whom Monsieur exhibited the warmest attachment, because he was of a very cheerful disposition even in his most malicious remarks, and

because he was never at a loss how to make the time pass away. The Chevalier de Lorraine, therefore, seeing that he was threatened with being supplanted by De Guiche, resorted to strong measures. He disappeared from the court, leaving Monsieur much embarrassed. The first day of his disappearance, Monsieur hardly inquired about him; for De Guiche was there, and except the time devoted to conversation with Madame, the count's days and nights were rigorously devoted to the prince. On the second day, however, Monsieur, finding no one near him, inquired where the chevalier was. He was told that no one knew.

De Guiche, after having spent the morning in selecting embroideries and fringes with Madame, went to console the prince. But after dinner, as there were tulips and amethysts to look at, De Guiche returned to Madame's boudoir. Monsieur was left quite to himself during the hour devoted to his toilet, he felt that he was the most miserable of men, and again inquired whether there was any news of the chevalier, in reply to which he was told that no one knew where Monsieur the Chevalier was to be found. Monsieur, hardly knowing in what direction to inflict his weariness, went to Madame's apartments dressed in his morning-gown and cap. He found a large assemblage of people there, laughing and whispering in every part of the room. At one end were a group of women around one of the courtiers, talking together amid smothered bursts of laughter; at the other end Manicamp and Malicorne were being pillaged by Montalais and Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente and two other laughing maids of honor. In a farther corner was Madame, seated upon some cushions, with De Guiche on his knees beside her, spreading out a handful of pearls and precious stones, while she, with her white and slen-

der finger pointed out such among them as pleased her the most. Again, in another corner of the room, a guitar-player was humming some of the Spanish seguedillas, to which Madame had taken the greatest fancy ever since she had heard them sung by the young queen with tender melancholy. But the songs which the Spaniard had sung with tears in her eyes, the young Englishwoman was humming with a smile which displayed her pearly teeth. The boudoir presented, in fact, a scene of hilarious enjoyment

As he entered, Monsieur was struck at beholding so many persons enjoying themselves without him. He was so jealous at the sight that he could not resist saying, like a child, "What! you are amusing yourselves here, while I weary myself all alone!"

The sound of his voice was like a clap of thunder which interrupts the warbling of birds in the leafy branches; a dead silence ensued. De Guiche was on his feet in a moment. Malicorne tried to hide himself behind Montalais's dress. Manicamp stood bolt upright, and assumed a very ceremonious demeanor. The guitar-player thrust the guitar under a table, covering it with a piece of carpet to conceal it from the prince's observation. Madame alone did not move, and smiling at her husband, replied to him, "Is not this the hour which you usually devote to your toilet?"

"An hour which others select, it seems, for amusing themselves," grumbled the prince

This untoward remark was the signal for a general rout. The women fled like a flock of frightened birds; the guitar-player vanished like a shadow. Malicorne, still protected by Montalais, who widened out her dress, glided behind the hanging tapestry. As for Manicamp, he went to the assistance of De Guiche, who naturally remained near

Madame; and both of them, with the princess herself, courageously sustained the attack. The count was too happy to bear malice against the husband, but Monsieur bore a grudge against his wife. He had been wanting a motive for a quarrel; he sought it. And the hurried departure of the crowd, which had been so merry before he arrived, and was so disturbed by his entrance, furnished him with a pretext.

"Why do they take to flight at the sight of me?" he inquired in a rough tone.

To this remark Madame replied coldly, "Whenever the master of the house makes his appearance, the household keep aloof out of respect."

As Madame said this, she made so funny and so pretty a grimace that De Guiche and Manicamp could not control themselves; they burst into a peal of laughter. Madame followed their example; and even Monsieur himself could not resist it, and was obliged to sit down, since in laughing he had sacrificed his dignity. However, he very soon left off; but his anger had increased. He was still more furious at having allowed himself to laugh than at having seen others laugh. He stared at Manicamp, not venturing to show his anger towards De Guiche. But at a sign which displayed too great an amount of annoyance, Manicamp and De Guiche left the room; so that Madame, deserted, began sadly to pick up her pearls, no longer laughing, and speaking still less.

"I am very happy," said the duke, "to find myself treated as a stranger here, Madame;" and he left the room in a passion.

On his way out he met Montalais, who was in attendance in the anteroom. "It is very agreeable to pay you a visit here," said he, — "but outside the door."

Montalais made a very low obeisance. "I do not quite understand," said she, "what your royal Highness does me the honor to say."

"I say, Mademoiselle, that when you are all laughing together in Madame's apartment, he is an unwelcome visitor who does not remain outside."

"Your royal Highness certainly does not think and speak so of yourself."

"On the contrary, Mademoiselle, it is on my own account that I do speak and think. I have no reason, certainly, to flatter myself on the reception I meet with here. How is it that on the very day when there is music and a little society in Madame's apartments, — in my own apartments, indeed, for they are mine, — on the very day when I wish to amuse myself a little in my turn, every one runs away? Are they afraid to see me, that they all took to flight as soon as I appeared? Is there anything wrong, then, going on in my absence?"

"But," replied Montalais, "nothing has been done to-day, Monseigneur, which is not done every day."

"What! do they laugh like that every day?"

"Why, yes, Monseigneur."

"Every day the same groups of people and the same strumming as just now!"

"The guitar, Monseigneur, was introduced to-day; but when we have no guitars, we have violins and flutes. Women get wearied without music."

"*Peste!* and the men!"

"What men, Monseigneur!"

"M. de Guiche, M. de Manicamp, and the others."

"They all belong to Monseigneur's household."

"Yes, yes, you 're right, Mademoiselle," said the prince; and he returned to his own apartments, full of thought. He threw himself into the deepest of his arm-chairs, with-

out looking at himself in the glass. "Where can the chevalier be?" said he.

One of the prince's attendants who happened to be near him, overheard his remark, and replied, "No one knows, Monseigneur."

"Still the same answer! The first one who answers me again, 'I do not know,' I will discharge."

Every one at this remark hurried out of the apartments, in the same manner as the others had fled from Madame's apartments. The prince then flew into the wildest rage. He kicked over a chiffonnier, which tumbled upon the floor, broken into pieces. He next went into the galleries, and with the greatest coolness threw down, one after another, an enamelled vase, a porphyry ewer, and a bronze candelabra. All this made a frightful noise, and every one appeared in the various doorways.

"What is your Highness's pleasure?" hazarded the captain of the Guards, timidly.

"I am treating myself to some music," replied Monseigneur, gnashing his teeth.

The captain of the Guards desired his royal Highness's physician to be sent for. But before he came, Malicorne arrived, saying to the prince, "Monseigneur, M. le Chevalier de Lorraine is here."

The duke looked at Malicorne, and smiled graciously at him, just as the chevalier entered.

CHAPTER XXXV.

M. DE LORRAINE'S JEALOUSY.

THE Duc d'Orléans uttered a cry of delight on perceiving the Chevalier de Lorraine. "This is fortunate, indeed!" he said. "By what happy chance do I see you? Had you indeed disappeared, as every one assured me?"

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"Some caprice?"

"I to venture upon caprices with your Highness! The respect —"

"Put respect out of the way, for you fail in it every day. I absolve you. But why did you go away?"

"Because I felt that I was of no use to you."

"Explain yourself."

"Your Highness has people about you who are far more amusing than I can ever be. I felt that I was not strong enough to enter into a contest with them, and I therefore withdrew."

"This extreme diffidence shows a want of common sense. Who are those with whom you cannot contend, — Guiche?"

"I name no one."

"This is absurd! Does Guiche annoy you?"

"I do not say that, Monseigneur. Do not force me to speak, however; you know very well that De Guiche is one of our best friends."

"Who is it, then?"

"Excuse me, Monseigneur; let us say no more about it, I beg of you." The chevalier knew perfectly well that curiosity is excited in the same way as thirst, — by removing that which quenches it; or, in other words, by delaying the explanation.

"No; I wish to know why you went away."

"In that case, Monseigneur, I will tell you; but do not be angry. I perceived that my presence was disagreeable."

"To whom?"

"To Madame."

"What do you mean?" said the duke, in astonishment.

"It is simple enough: Madame is very probably jealous of the regard you are good enough to testify for me."

"Has she shown it to you?"

"Monseigneur, Madame never addresses a syllable to me, — particularly since a certain time."

"Since what time?"

"Since the time when, M de Guiche having made himself more agreeable to her than I could, she receives him at all hours."

The duke colored. "At all hours, Chevalier? What do you mean by that?" said he, sternly.

"You see, Monseigneur, that I have displeased you; I was quite sure I should."

"I am not displeased; but you say things a little strong. In what respect does Madame prefer De Guiche to you?"

"I shall say no more," said the chevalier, with a ceremonious bow.

"On the contrary, I require you to speak. If you withdraw on that account, you must indeed be very jealous."

"One cannot help being jealous, Monseigneur, when one loves. Is not your royal Highness jealous of Madame? Would not your royal Highness, if you saw some one always near Madame and always treated with great favor, take umbrage at it? One's friends are as one's lovers. Your royal Highness has sometimes conferred upon me the distinguished honor of calling me your friend."

"Yes, yes; but here again is an equivocal expression. Chevalier, you are unfortunate in your remarks."

"What expression, Monseigneur?"

"You said, 'treated with great favor.' What do you mean by 'favor'?"

"Nothing can be more simple, Monseigneur," said the chevalier, with great frankness "For instance, when a husband remarks that his wife summons, from preference, such and such a man near her; when this man is always to be found by her side or in attendance at the door of her carriage; when that man is always found within reach of her hand; when persons get together beyond the reach of general conversation; when the bouquet of the one is always of the same color as the ribbons of the other; when concerts and supper-parties are held in the private apartments; when a dead silence takes place as soon as the husband makes his appearance in his wife's rooms; and when the husband suddenly finds that he has as a companion the most devoted and the kindest of men, who a week before was with him as little as possible, — why, then — "

"Well, finish!"

"Why, then, I say, Monseigneur, one possibly may get jealous. But all these details hardly apply; for our conversation had nothing to do with them."

The duke was evidently much agitated, and seemed

contending with himself. "You have not told me," he at last remarked, "why you absented yourself. A little while ago you said it was from fear of intruding; you added, even, that you had observed a disposition on Madame's part to encourage De Guiche."

"Ah, Monseigneur, I did not say that!"

"You did, indeed."

"Well, if I did say so, I noticed nothing but what was very inoffensive."

"At all events, you remarked something."

"You embarrass me, Monseigneur."

"What does that matter? Answer me! If you speak the truth, why should you feel embarrassed?"

"I always speak the truth, Monseigneur; but I also always hesitate when it is a question of repeating what others say."

"Ah! you are repeating? It appears that it is talked about, then?"

"I acknowledge that others have spoken to me on the subject."

"Who?"

The chevalier assumed almost an angry air as he replied: "Monseigneur, you are subjecting me to an examination; you treat me like a criminal at the bar. The rumors which touch a gentleman's ears in passing do not tarry there. Your Highness wishes me to magnify the rumor until it attains the importance of an event."

"However," said the duke, in great displeasure, "the fact remains that you yourself withdrew on account of this report."

"To speak the truth, others have talked to me of the attentions of M. de Guiche to Madame, — nothing more; perfectly harmless, I repeat, and, more than that, permissible. But do not be unjust, Monseigneur, and do

not attach an undue importance to it. It does not concern you."

"Gossip about M. de Guiche's attentions to Madame does not concern me?"

"No, Monseigneur; and what I say to you I would say to De Guiche himself, so little do I think of the court he pays Madame. Nay, I would say it even to Madame herself. Only, you understand what I am afraid of; I am afraid of being thought jealous of the favor shown, when I am only jealous so far as friendship is concerned. I know your disposition; I know that when you bestow your affections you become exclusively attached. You love Madame, — and who, indeed, would not love her? Follow me attentively as I proceed. Madame has noticed among your friends the handsomest and most fascinating of them all; she will begin to influence you on his behalf in such a way that you will neglect the others. Your indifference would kill me; it is already bad enough to have to endure that of Madame. I have therefore made up my mind, Monseigneur, to give way to the favorite whose happiness I envy, even while I acknowledge my sincere friendship and sincere admiration for him. Now, do you see anything to object to in this reasoning? Is it not that of a man of honor? Is my conduct that of a sincere friend? Answer me, at least, after having so closely questioned me."

The duke had seated himself, with his head buried in his hands and his hair dishevelled. After a silence long enough to enable the chevalier to judge of the effect of his oratorical display, Monseigneur rose, saying, "Come, be candid."

"As I always am."

"Very well. You know that we have already observed something respecting that mad fellow, Buckingham."

"Oh, do not say anything against Madame, Monseigneur, or I shall take my leave. What! do you go so far as to be suspicious of Madame?"

"No, no, Chevalier, I do not suspect Madame; but, in fact, I observe — I compare —"

"Buckingham was a madman, Monseigneur."

"A madman about whom, however, you opened my eyes thoroughly."

"No, no," said the chevalier, quickly; "it was not I who opened your eyes, it was De Guiche. Do not confound us, I beg!" and he began to laugh so harshly that it sounded like the hiss of an adder.

"Yes, yes; I remember. You said a few words, but De Guiche showed the most jealousy."

"I should think so," continued the chevalier, in the same tone. "He was fighting for home and altar."

"What did you say?" said the duke, haughtily, thoroughly roused by this insidious jest.

"Am I not right, for is not M. de Guiche the first gentleman of your household?"

"Well," replied the duke, somewhat calmed, "had this passion of Buckingham been remarked?"

"Certainly."

"Very well. Do people say that M. de Guiche's is remarked as much?"

"Pardon me, Monseigneur; you are again mistaken. No one says that M. de Guiche entertains anything of the sort."

"Very good."

"You see, Monseigneur, that it would have been better, a hundred times better, to have left me in my retirement, than to have allowed yourself to conjure up, by the aid of any scruples which I may have had, suspicions which Madame will regard as crimes; and she will be right too."

"What would you do?"

"Act reasonably."

"In what way?"

"I should not pay the slightest attention to the society of these new Epicureans; and in that way the rumors will cease."

"I will see; I will think it over."

"Oh, you have time enough! The danger is not great, and then, besides, it is not a question either of danger or of passion. It all arose from a fear of seeing your friendship for me decrease. From the very moment when you restore it to me with so kind an assurance, I have no longer any other idea in my head."

The duke shook his head, as if he meant to say, "If you have no more ideas, I have, though."

The dinner-hour having arrived, the prince sent to inform Madame of it, who returned a message to the effect that she could not be present at the feast, but would dine in her own apartment.

"That is not my fault," said the duke. "This morning, having taken them by surprise in the midst of a musical assembly, I got jealous; and so they are in the sulks with me."

"We will dine alone," said the chevalier, with a sigh. "I regret that De Guiche is not here."

"Oh, De Guiche will not remain long in the sulks; he is a very good-natured fellow."

"Monseigneur," said the chevalier, suddenly, "an excellent idea has struck me in our conversation just now. I may have exasperated your Highness, and caused you some dissatisfaction. It is but fitting that I should be the mediator. I will go and look for the count, and bring him back with me."

"Ah, Chevalier, you are a good soul!"

"You say that as if you were surprised."

"Well, you are not so tender-hearted every day."

"That may be; but confess that I know how to repair a wrong I may have done."

"I confess that."

"Will your Highness do me the favor to wait here a few minutes?"

"Willingly; be off, and I will try on my Fontainebleau costume."

The chevalier left the room, and called his attendants with the greatest care, as if he were giving them various orders. All went off in different directions, but he retained his *valet de chambre*. "Ascertain," said he, "and immediately too, whether M. de Guiche is not in Madame's apartments. How can it be ascertained?"

"Very easily, Monsieur the Chevalier. I will ask Malicorne, who will learn it from Mademoiselle de Montalais. I may as well tell you, however, that the inquiry will be useless; for all M. de Guiche's attendants have gone, and he must have left with them."

"Try to find out, nevertheless."

Ten minutes had hardly passed when the valet returned. He beckoned his master mysteriously towards the servants' staircase, and showed him into a small room with a window looking out upon the garden. "What is the matter?" said the chevalier; "why so many precautions?"

"Look, Monsieur!" said the valet, "look yonder, under the walnut-tree!"

"Ah! *Mon Dieu!*" said the chevalier, "I see Manicamp there. What is he waiting for?"

"You will see if you wait patiently. There, do you see now?"

"I see one, two, four musicians with their instruments,

and behind them, urging them on, De Guiche himself. What is he doing there, though?"

"He is waiting until the little door of the staircase belonging to the ladies of honor is opened; by that staircase he will ascend to Madame's apartments, where some new pieces of music are going to be performed during dinner."

"This is admirable that you tell me."

"Is it not, Monsieur?"

"Was it M. Malicorne who told you this?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"He likes you, then?"

"No, Monsieur; it is Monsieur whom he likes."

"Why?"

"Because he wishes to belong to his household."

"*Mordieu!* so he shall. How much has he given you for that?"

"The secret which I now dispose of to you, Monsieur."

"And which I buy for a hundred pistoles. Take them."

"Thank you, Monsieur. Look! the little door opens; a woman admits the musicians."

"It is Montalais."

"Hush, Monsieur! Do not call out her name; whoever says Montalais, says Malicorne. If you quarrel with the one, you will be on bad terms with the other."

"Very well; I have seen nothing."

"And I," said the valet, pocketing the purse, "have received nothing."

The chevalier, being now certain that De Guiche had entered, returned to Monsieur, whom he found splendidly dressed and radiant with joy as well as with beauty. "I am told," he exclaimed, "that the king has taken the sun as his device; really, Monseigneur, it is you whom this device would better suit."

"Where is De Guiche?"

"He cannot be found. He has fled, has evaporated entirely. Your scolding of this morning has scared him away. He could not be found in his apartments."

"Bah! the hare-brained fellow is capable of setting off post-haste to his own estates. Poor fellow! we will recall him. Come, let us dine now."

"Monseigneur, to-day is a day of ideas; I have another."

"What is it?"

"Monseigneur, Madame is angry with you, and she has reason to be so. You owe her her revenge; go and dine with her."

"Oh, that would be acting like a weak husband!"

"No, like a good husband. The princess is no doubt wearied enough; she will be weeping in her plate, and her eyes will get quite red. A husband who is the cause of his wife's eyes getting red is an odious creature. Come, Monseigneur, come!"

"I cannot, for I have directed dinner to be served here."

"Yet see, Monseigneur, how dull we shall be! I shall have a heavy heart because I know that Madame will be alone; you, hard and savage as you wish to appear, will be sighing all the while. Take me with you to Madame's dinner, and that will be a delightful surprise. I am sure we shall be very merry. You were wrong this morning."

"Well, perhaps I was."

"There is no perhaps at all, for it is a fact."

"Chevalier, Chevalier, your advice is not good."

"Nay, my advice is good; all the advantages are on your own side. Your violet-colored suit embroidered with gold becomes you admirably. Madame will be still

more overcome by the man than by this handsome conduct. Come, Monseigneur!"

"You decide me; let us go."

The duke left his room, accompanied by the chevalier, and went towards Madame's apartments. The chevalier hastily whispered to his valet, "Be sure that there are some people before the little door, so that no one can escape in that direction. Run, run!" and he followed the duke to the antechambers of Madame's suite of apartments; and when the ushers were about to announce them, the chevalier said, laughing, "Do not stir; his Highness wishes to give a surprise."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MONSIEUR IS JEALOUS OF DE GUICHE.

Monsieur entered the room abruptly, as those persons enter who mean well and think they confer pleasure, or as those do who hope to surprise some secret, — the melancholy boon of jealous people. Madame, intoxicated by the first bars of the music, was dancing in the most unrestrained manner, leaving unfinished the dinner which she had begun. Her partner was M. de Guiche, who with his arms raised and his eyes half closed was kneeling on one knee, like the Spanish dancers, with eyes full of passion and with caressing gestures. The princess was dancing round him with a responsive smile and the same alluring seductiveness. Montalais stood by admiringly; La Vallière, seated in a corner of the room, looked on thoughtfully.

It is impossible to describe the effect which the presence of Monsieur produced upon this happy company, and it would be just as impossible to describe the effect which the sight of their happiness produced upon Philip. The Comte de Guiche had no power to move. Madame remained in the middle of one of the figures, in a suspended attitude, unable to utter a word. The Chevalier de Lorraine, leaning back against the door-frame, smiled like a man in the very height of the frankest admiration. The pallor of the prince and the convulsive trembling of his hands and limbs were the first symptoms that struck those present. A dead silence succeeded the sound of the

dance. The Chevalier de Lorraine took advantage of this interval to salute Madame and De Guiche respectively, affecting to include them both in his reverences, as though they were the master and mistress of the house.

Monsieur then approached them, saying in a hoarse tone, "I am delighted. I came here expecting to find you ill and low-spirited, and I see you occupied in new amusements. Really, it is most fortunate. My house is the merriest in the world" Then, turning towards De Guiche, "Count," he said, "I did not know you were so good a dancer." And again addressing his wife, he said, with a bitterness of expression which disguised his wrath, "Show a little more consideration for me, Madame! Whenever you intend to amuse yourselves here, invite me; I am a prince very much neglected."

De Guiche had now recovered his self possession, and with the spirited boldness which was natural to him and which so well became him, he said, "Your Highness knows very well that my very life is at your service, and whenever there is a question of its being needed, I am ready; but to day, as it is only a question of dancing to music, I dance."

"And you are perfectly right," said the prince, coldly. "But, Madame," he continued, "you do not observe that your ladies deprive me of my friends? M. de Guiche does not belong to you, Madame, but to me. If you wish to dine without me, you have your ladies; when I dine without you, I have my gentlemen. Do not rob me of everything."

Madame felt the reproach and the lesson, and the color rushed to her face. "Monsieur," she replied, "I was not aware, when I came to the Court of France, that princesses of my rank were to be regarded as the women in Turkey are, — I was not aware that we were not allowed

to see men; but since such is your desire, I will conform to it. Pray do not hesitate, if you should wish it, to have my windows barred."

This repartee, which made Montalais and De Guiche smile, rekindled the prince's anger, no inconsiderable portion of which had already evaporated in words.

"Very well," he said, in a concentrated tone of voice, "this is the way in which I am respected in my own house."

"Monseigneur, Monseigneur!" murmured the chevalier in Monsieur's ear, in such a manner that every one could observe that he was endeavoring to calm him.

"Come!" replied the duke, as his only answer, hurrying him away, and turning round with so hasty a movement that he almost ran against Madame.

The chevalier followed his master to his own apartment, where the prince was no sooner seated than he gave free rein to his fury. The chevalier raised his eyes to the ceiling, clasped his hands together, and said not a word.

"Give me your opinion!" exclaimed the prince.

"Upon what, Monseigneur?"

"Upon all that is taking place here."

"Oh, Monseigneur, it is a very serious matter!"

"It is abominable! I cannot live in this manner."

"How unhappy all this is!" said the chevalier. "We hoped to enjoy tranquillity after that madman Buckingham had left."

"And this is worse."

"I do not say that, Monseigneur."

"Yes; but I say it, for Buckingham would never have ventured upon a fourth part of what we have just now seen."

"What do you mean?"

"To conceal one's self for the purpose of dancing, and to feign indisposition in order to dine *tête-à-tête*."

"Oh, no, no, Monseigneur!"

"Yes, yes," exclaimed the prince, exciting himself like a self-willed child; "but I will not endure it any longer, I must know what is going on."

"Monseigneur, an exposure- "

"By Heaven, Monsieur, am I to restrain myself when people show so little consideration for me? Wait for me here, Chevalier, wait for me here!" The prince disappeared in the next room, and inquired of the gentleman in attendance if the queen-mother had returned from chapel.

Anne of Austria felt that her happiness was now complete. Peace restored to her family, and the nation delighted with the presence of a young monarch who promised a grand administration; the revenues of the State increased; external peace assured, — everything seemed to presage a tranquil future for her. Her thoughts recurred now and then to that poor young man whom she had received as a mother and had driven away as a hard-hearted stepmother, and she sighed as she thought of him.

Suddenly the Duc d'Orléans entered her room. "Dear mother," he exclaimed, closing the doors hurriedly, "things cannot go on as they now are."

Anne of Austria raised her beautiful eyes towards him, and with an unmoved gentleness of manner said, "To what things do you allude?"

"I wish to speak of Madame."

"Your wife?"

"Yes, mother."

"I suppose that silly fellow Buckingham has been writing a farewell letter to her."

"Oh, yes, Madame; of course, it is a question of Buckingham!"

"Of whom else could it be, then?—for that poor fellow was, wrongly enough, the object of your jealousy, and I thought—"

"My wife, Madame, has already replaced the Duke of Buckingham."

"Philip, what are you saying? You are speaking very heedlessly."

"No, no. Madame has done so well that I am still jealous."

"Of whom, in Heaven's name?"

"Is it possible that you have not remarked it? Have you not noticed that M. de Guiche is always in her apartments, always with her?"

The queen clapped her hands together and began to laugh. "Philip," she said, "your jealousy is not merely a defect, it is a positive disease."

"Whether a defect or a disease, Madame, I suffer from it."

"And do you imagine that a complaint which exists only in your own imagination can be cured? You wish it to be said that you are right in being jealous, when there is no ground whatever for your jealousy."

"Of course you will begin to say for this one what you said for the other."

"Because, my son," said the queen, dryly, "what you did for the other, you are beginning again for this one."

The prince bowed, slightly annoyed. "If I give you facts," he said, "will you believe me?"

"If it regarded anything else but jealousy, my son, I would believe you without your alleging facts; but as jealousy is in the case, I promise you nothing."

"Then this is just the same as if your Majesty were to order me to hold my tongue, and sent me away unheard."

"Far from it; as you are my son, I owe you a mother's indulgence."

"Oh, say what you think, — you owe me as much indulgence as a madman deserves."

"Do not exaggerate, Philip, and take care how you represent your wife to me as a woman of a depraved mind — "

"But facts, mother, facts!"

"Well, I am listening."

"This morning, at ten o'clock, they were playing music in Madame's apartments."

"No harm in that, surely."

"M. de Guiche was talking with her alone — Ah! I forgot to tell you that for a week he has haunted her like a shadow."

"If they were doing any harm, they would hide themselves."

"Very good," exclaimed the duke, "I expected you to say that. Pray, do not forget what you have just said. This morning, I say, I took them by surprise, and showed my dissatisfaction in a very marked manner."

"Rely upon it, that is quite sufficient; it was, perhaps, even a little too much. These young women easily take offence. To reproach them for an error they have not committed is sometimes almost the same as telling them they may do it."

"Very good, very good; but wait a minute. Do not forget what you have just this minute said, Madame, that this morning's lesson ought to have been sufficient, and that if they had been doing what was wrong, they would have concealed themselves."

"Yes, I said so."

"Well, just now, repenting of my hastiness of this morning and supposing that Guiche was sulking in his

own apartments, I went to pay Madame a visit. Can you guess what or whom I found there? Another band of musicians, dancing, and Guiche himself, — he was concealed there."

Anne of Austria frowned. "It was imprudent," she said. "What did Madame say?"

"Nothing."

"And Guiche?"

"As much — oh, no! he stammered forth some impertinences."

"Well, what is your opinion, Philip?"

"That I have been made a fool of; that Buckingham was only a pretext, and that the true culprit is Guiche."

Anne shrugged her shoulders. "Well," she said, "what else?"

"I wish De Guiche to be dismissed from my household, as Buckingham was; and I shall ask the king, unless —"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you, Madame, who are so clever and so kind, will execute the commission yourself."

"I shall not do it."

"What, Madame!"

"Listen, Philip! I am not disposed to pay people ill compliments every day; I have some influence over young people, but I cannot take advantage of it without risk of losing it altogether. Besides, there is nothing to prove that M. de Guiche is guilty."

"He has displeased me."

"That is your own affair."

"Very well, I know what I shall do," said the prince, impetuously.

Anne looked at him with some uneasiness. "What will you do?" she said.

"I will have him drowned in my reservoir the next time I find him in my apartments again."

Having launched this terrible threat, the prince expected that his mother would be frightened out of her senses; but the queen was unmoved by it. "Do so," she said.

Philip was as weak as a woman, and began to cry out, "Every one betrays me, no one cares for me; my mother even joins my enemies."

"Your mother sees further in the matter than you do, and does not care about advising you, since you do not listen to her."

"I will go to the king."

"I was about to propose that to you. I am now expecting his Majesty here, — it is the hour he usually pays me a visit; explain the matter to him yourself."

She had hardly finished when Philip heard the door of the anteroom open with some noise. He began to feel nervous. At the sound of the king's footsteps, which could be heard upon the carpet, the duke hurriedly made his escape by a small door, leaving the ground to the queen.

Anne of Austria began to laugh, and was laughing still when the king entered. He came very affectionately to inquire after the even now uncertain health of the queen-mother, and to announce to her that the preparations for the journey to Fontainebleau were completed. Seeing her laugh, his uneasiness on her account diminished, and he addressed her in a laughing tone himself. Anne of Austria took him by the hand, and in a voice full of playfulness, said, "Do you know that I am proud of being a Spanish woman?"

"Why, Madame?"

"Because Spanish women are worth more than English women at least."

"Explain yourself."

"Since your marriage you have not, I believe, had a single reproach to make against the queen."

"Certainly not."

"And you, too, have been married some time. Your brother, on the contrary, has been married only a fortnight."

"Well?"

"He is now finding fault with Madame a second time."

"What! Buckingham still?"

"No, another."

"Who?"

"De Guiche."

"Really, Madame is a coquette, then?"

"I fear so."

"My poor brother," said the king, laughing.

"You do not mind coquetry, it seems?"

"In Madame certainly I do; but Madame is not a coquette at heart."

"That may be, but your brother is excessively angry about it."

"What does he want?"

"He wishes to drown De Guiche."

"That is a violent measure to resort to."

"Do not laugh! he is extremely irritated. Think of what can be done."

"To save De Guiche? — certainly."

"Oh, if your brother heard you, he would conspire against you as your uncle Monsieur did against the king your father."

"No; Philip has too much affection for me for that, and I on my side have too great a regard for him. We shall live together on very good terms. But what is the substance of his request?"

"That you will prevent Madame from being a coquette, and De Guiche from being agreeable."

"Is that all? My brother has an exalted idea of the royal power. To reform a woman, to say nothing of reforming a man!"

"How will you set about it?"

"With a word to De Guiche, who is a clever fellow, I will undertake to convince him."

"But Madame?"

"That is more difficult, a word will not be enough. I will compose a homily and preach it to her."

"There is no time to be lost."

"Oh, I will use the utmost diligence. There is a repetition of the ballet after dinner."

"You will read her a lecture while you are dancing?"

"Yes, Madame."

"You promise to convert her?"

"I will root out the heresy altogether, either by convincing her or by extreme measures."

"That is all right, then. Do not mix me up in the affair. Madame would never forgive me in her life; and as a mother-in-law, I ought to try to live on good terms with my daughter-in-law."

"The king, Madame, will take all upon himself. But let me reflect."

"What about?"

"It would be better, perhaps, if I were to go and see Madame in her own apartment."

"Would not that seem a somewhat serious step to take?"

"Yes; but seriousness is not unbecoming in preachers, and the music of the ballet would drown one half of my arguments. Besides, the object is to prevent any violent measures on my brother's part, so that a little

precipitation may be advisable. Is Madame in her own apartment?"

"I believe so."

"Of what is my statement of grievances to consist?"

"In a few words, of the following: music uninterruptedly; De Guiche's assiduity; suspicions of treasonable plots and practices."

"And the proofs?"

"There are none."

"Very well; I shall go at once to see Madame." The king turned to look in the mirrors at his costume, which was very rich, and at his face, which was as radiant and sparkling as diamonds. "I suppose my brother is kept a little at a distance," he said.

"Oh, fire and water cannot possibly be more uncongenial!"

"That will do. Permit me, Madame, to kiss your hands, — the most beautiful hands in France."

"May you be successful, Sire, — may you be the family peacemaker!"

"I do not employ an ambassador," replied Louis, — "which is as much as to say that I shall succeed." He went out laughing, and carefully brushed his dress as he went along.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE MEDIATOR.

When the king made his appearance in Madame's apartment, the courtiers, whom the news of a conjugal scene had dispersed in the various rooms, began to entertain the most serious apprehensions. A storm, too, was brewing in that direction, the elements of which the Chevalier de Lorraine, in the midst of the different groups, was analyzing with delight, magnifying the weaker, and acting, according to his own wicked designs, in such a manner with regard to the stronger as to produce the most disastrous consequences possible. As Anne of Austria had said, the presence of the king gave a serious character to the event. Indeed, in the year 1662 the dissatisfaction of Monsieur with Madame, and the king's intervention in the private affairs of Monsieur, were matters of no inconsiderable moment.

Therefore the boldest, even, of the associates of the Comte de Guiche had been seen from the first moment to hold aloof from him with a sort of fright; and the count himself, infected by the general panic, retired to his own apartments alone. The king entered Madame's private apartment, acknowledging and returning the salutations, as he was always in the habit of doing. The ladies of honor were ranged in a line on his passage along the gallery. Although his Majesty was very much preoccupied, he gave the glance of a master at the two rows of young and beautiful girls, who modestly cast

down their eyes, blushing as they felt the king's gaze upon them. One only of the number, whose long hair fell in silken ringlets upon the most beautiful skin imaginable, — one only was pale, and could hardly sustain herself, notwithstanding the hints which her companion gave her with her elbow. It was La Vallière, whom Montalais supported in that manner by whispering some of that courage to her with which she herself was so abundantly provided. The king could not resist turning round to look at them again. Their faces, which had already been raised, were again lowered; but the only fair head among them remained motionless, as if all her remaining strength and intelligence had abandoned her.

When he entered Madame's room, Louis found his sister-in-law reclining upon the cushions of her boudoir. She rose and made a profound reverence, murmuring some words of thanks for the honor she was receiving. She then resumed her seat, overcome by a sudden weakness, — which was no doubt assumed, for a delightful color animated her cheeks, while her eyes, still red from a few tears she had recently shed, never had more fire in them. When the king was seated, and as soon as he had remarked, with that accuracy of observation which characterized him, the disorder of the room and the no less great disorder of Madame's countenance, he assumed a playful manner, saying, "My dear sister, at what hour to-day do you wish the repetition of the ballet to take place?"

Madame, shaking her charming head, slowly and languishingly said: "Ah! Sire, will you graciously excuse my appearance at the repetition? I was about to send to inform your Majesty that I could not attend to-day."

"Indeed!" said the king, in apparent surprise; "are you not well, Sister?"

"No, Sire."

"I will summon your medical attendants, then."

"No, for they can do nothing for my indisposition."

"You alarm me."

"Sire, I wish to ask your Majesty's permission to return to England."

The king started. "Return to England!" he said; "do you really say what you mean, Madame?"

"I say it reluctantly, Sire," replied the granddaughter of Henry IV. firmly, her beautiful black eyes flashing. "I regret to have to confide such matters to your Majesty; but I feel myself too unhappy at your Majesty's court, and I wish to return to my own family."

"Madame, Madame!" exclaimed the king, approaching her.

"Listen to me, Sire!" continued the young woman, acquiring by degrees that ascendency over her interrogator which her beauty and her energetic nature conferred. "I am accustomed to suffering; young as I am, I have already suffered humiliation and have endured disdain. Oh, do not contradict me, Sire!" she said, with a smile. The king colored. "Then," she continued, "I have come to believe that God had called me into existence with that object, — me, the daughter of a powerful monarch; but since he could strike at the life of my father, he might well strike at pride in me. I have suffered greatly; I have been the cause, too, of my mother's suffering much; but I have sworn that if Providence should ever place me in a position of independence, even were it that of a workwoman of the lower classes who gains her bread by her labor, I would never suffer humiliation again. That day has now arrived: I have been restored to the fortune due to my rank and to my birth; I have ascended again the steps of a throne; and I thought that in

allying myself with a French prince, I should find in him a relative, a friend, an equal; but I perceive that I have found only a master, and I rebel, Sire. My mother shall know nothing of it; you whom I respect, and whom I — love —" The king started; never had any voice so gratified his ear. "You, Sire, I say, — who know all, since you have come here, — you will, perhaps, understand me. If you had not come, I should have gone to you. I wish for permission to depart without restraint. I leave it to your delicacy of feeling — to you, a man *par excellence* — to exculpate and to protect me."

"My dear sister," murmured the king, overpowered by this bold attack, "have you well reflected upon the enormous difficulty of the project you have conceived?"

"Sire, I do not reflect, I feel. Attacked, I instinctively repel the attack; that is all."

"Come, tell me, what have they done to you?" said the king.

The princess, it will have been seen, by this peculiarly feminine manœuvre had escaped every reproach, and advanced on her side a far more serious one; from an accused, she became the accuser. It is an infallible sign of guilt; but from this palpable fault all women, even the least clever of the sex, invariably know how to derive some means of attaining success. The king had forgotten that he had paid her a visit in order to say to her, "What have you done to my brother?" and that he was reduced to saying to her, "What have they done to you?"

"What have they done to me?" replied Madame; "oh, one must be a woman to understand it, Sire! — they have made me weep;" and with a finger whose slenderness and pearly whiteness were unequalled, she pointed to her brilliant eyes swimming in tears, and again began to weep.

"I implore you, my dear sister," said the king, advancing to take her warm and throbbing hand, which she surrendered to him.

"In the first place, Sire, I was deprived of the presence of my brother's friend. The Duke of Buckingham was to me an agreeable, cheerful visitor, my own countryman, who knew my habits, — I will say almost a companion, so accustomed had we been to pass our days together, with our other friends, upon the beautiful piece of water at St. James's."

"But, my sister, Villiers was in love with you."

"A pretext! What does it matter," she said seriously, "whether the Duke of Buckingham was in love with me or not? Is a man in love so very dangerous for me? Ah, Sire, it is not sufficient for a man to love a woman;" and she smiled so tenderly and with so much archness that the king felt his heart beat and throb within his breast.

"At all events, if my brother were jealous?" interrupted the king.

"Very well, I admit that is a reason; and the Duke of Buckingham was sent away accordingly."

"No, not sent away."

"Driven away, expelled, dismissed, then, if you prefer it, Sire. One of the first gentlemen of Europe was obliged to leave the Court of the King of France, of Louis XIV., like a beggar, on account of a glance or a bouquet. It was little worthy of this most gallant court. But forgive me, Sire; I forgot that, in speaking thus, I am attacking your sovereign power."

"I assure you, my dear sister, it was not I who dismissed the Duke of Buckingham; I was very much charmed with him."

"It was not you?" said Madame, cleverly; "ah, so

much the better!" and she emphasized the "so much the better" as if she had instead said, "so much the worse."

A few minutes' silence ensued. Madame then resumed: "The Duke of Buckingham having left, — I now know why and by whose means, — I thought I should have recovered my tranquillity; but not at all, for all at once Monsieur finds another pretext, all at once — "

"All at once," said the king, playfully, "some one else presents himself. It is but natural; you are beautiful, Madame, and men will always love you."

"In that case," exclaimed the princess, "I shall create a solitude around me, — which indeed seems to be what is wished, and what is being prepared for me; but no, I prefer to return to London. There I am known and appreciated; I shall have friends without fearing that they may be regarded as my lovers. Shame! it is a disgraceful suspicion, and unworthy a gentleman. Monsieur has lost everything in my estimation, since he has shown me that he can be the tyrant of a woman."

"Nay, nay; my brother's only fault is that of loving you."

"Love me! Monsieur love me! Ah, Sire," and she burst out laughing, "Monsieur will never love any woman," she said; "Monsieur loves himself too much. No, unhappily for me, Monsieur's jealousy is of the worst kind, — he is jealous without love."

"Confess, however," said the king, who began to be excited by this varied and animated conversation, — "confess that De Guiche loves you."

"Ah, Sire, I know nothing about that."

"You must have perceived it; a man who loves betrays himself."

"M. de Guiche has not betrayed himself."

"My dear sister, you are defending M. de Guiche."

"I, indeed! Ah, Sire, I only needed a suspicion from yourself to complete my wretchedness."

"No, Madame, no," returned the king, hurriedly; "do not distress yourself, — nay, you are weeping. Calm yourself, I implore you!"

She wept, however, and large tears fell upon her hands. The king took one of her hands in his, and kissed the tears away. She looked at him so sadly and with so much tenderness that his heart was melted.

"You have no feeling, then, for De Guiche?" he said, more disturbed than became his character of mediator.

"None, absolutely none."

"Then I can reassure my brother in that respect?"

"Nothing will satisfy him, Sire. Do not believe that he is jealous. Monsieur has been badly advised by some one, and he is of an uneasy disposition"

"He may well be so when you are concerned," said the king.

Madame cast down her eyes, and was silent; the king did so likewise, holding her hand all the while. His momentary silence seemed to last an age. Madame gently withdrew her hand, and from that moment she felt that her triumph was certain, and that the field of battle was her own.

"Monsieur complains," said the king, diffidently, "that you prefer the society of private individuals to his own conversation and society."

"Sire, Monsieur passes his life in looking at his face in the glass, and in plotting with the Chevalier de Lorraine all sorts of spiteful things against women."

"Oh, you are going somewhat too far!"

"I only say what is the fact. Do you observe for yourself, Sire, and you will see that I am right."

"I will observe; but in the mean time what satisfaction can I give my brother?"

"My departure."

"You repeat that word!" exclaimed the king, imprudently, as if during the last ten minutes such a change had been produced that Madame would have had all her ideas on the subject thoroughly changed.

"Sire, I cannot be happy here any longer," she said. "M. de Guiche annoys Monsieur; will he be sent away too?"

"If it be necessary, why not?" replied Louis XIV., smiling.

"Well, and after M. de Guiche, — whom, by the by, I shall regret, I warn you, Sire."

"Ah, you will regret him?"

"Certainly; he is agreeable, he has a great friendship for me, and he amuses me."

"Ah, if Monsieur were only to hear you," said the king, nettled, "do you know, I would not undertake to make it up again between you; nay, I would not even attempt it."

"Sire, can you even now prevent Monsieur from being jealous of the first comer? I know very well that M. de Guiche is not the first."

"Again I warn you that, as a good brother, I shall take a dislike to M. de Guiche."

"Ah, Sire," said Madame, "do not, I entreat you, adopt either the sympathies or the dislikes of Monsieur! Remain the king; it will be far better for yourself and for every one else."

"You jest most charmingly, Madame; and I can well understand how even those whom you attack must adore you."

"And is that the reason why you, Sire, whom I had

regarded as my defender, are about to join those who persecute me?" said Madame.

"I your persecutor! Heaven forbid!"

"Then," she continued languishingly, "grant me my request."

"What do you wish?"

"To return to England."

"Never, never!" exclaimed Louis XIV.

"I am a prisoner, then?"

"In France, yes."

"What must I do, then?"

"I will tell you, my sister. Instead of devoting yourself to friendships which are somewhat unsuitable, instead of alarming us by your retirement, remain always in our society, — do not leave us, let us live as a united family. M. de Guiche is certainly very agreeable; but if at least we do not possess his wit —"

"Ah, Sire, you know very well that you are pretending to be modest."

"No, I swear to you. One may be a king, and yet feel that he possesses fewer chances of pleasing than many other gentlemen."

"I am sure, Sire, that you do not believe a single word you are saying."

The king looked at Madame tenderly, and said, "Will you promise me one thing?"

"What is it?"

"That you will no longer waste upon strangers in your boudoir the time which you owe us. Shall we make an offensive and defensive alliance against the common enemy?"

"An alliance? With you, Sire?"

"Why not? Are you not a sovereign power?"

"But are you, Sire, a very faithful ally?"

"You shall see, Madame."

"And when shall this alliance begin?"

"This very day."

"I will draw up the treaty, and you shall sign it."

"Blindly."

"Then, Sire, I promise you wonders; you are the star of the court, and when you make your appearance everything will be resplendent."

"Oh, Madame, Madame," said Louis XIV., "you know well that there is no brilliancy which does not proceed from yourself, and that if I assume the sun as my device, it is only an emblem."

"Sire, you flatter your ally,—therefore you wish to deceive her," said Madame, threatening the king with her roguish finger.

"What! you believe that I am deceiving you, when I assure you of my affection?"

"Yes."

"What makes you so suspicious?"

"One thing."

"What is it? I shall indeed be unhappy if I do not overcome one single thing."

"That one thing in question, Sire, is not in your power, not even in the power of Heaven."

"Tell me what it is."

"The past."

"I do not understand, Madame," said the king, precisely because he had understood her but too well.

The princess took his hand in hers. "Sire," she said, "I have had the misfortune to displease you for so long a period that I have almost the right to ask myself to-day why you were able to accept me as a sister-in-law."

"Displease me! You have displeased me?"

"Nay, do not deny it, for I remember it well."

"Our alliance shall date from to-day," exclaimed the king, with a warmth that was not assumed. "You will not think any more of the past, will you? I myself am resolved that I will not. I shall always remember the present; I have it before my eyes, — look!" and he led the princess before a mirror, in which she saw herself reflected, blushing and beautiful enough to overcome a saint.

"It is all the same," she murmured; "it will not be a very strong alliance."

"Must I swear?" inquired the king, intoxicated by the voluptuous turn the whole conversation had taken.

"Oh, I do not refuse a good oath," said Madame; "it has always the semblance of security."

The king knelt upon a footstool, and took hold of Madame's hand. She, with a smile which a painter could not render and which a poet only could imagine, gave him both her hands, in which he hid his burning face. Neither of them could utter a syllable. The king felt Madame withdraw her hands, caressing his face while she did so. He rose immediately and left the apartment. The courtiers remarked his heightened color, and concluded that the scene had been a stormy one. The Chevalier de Lorraine, however, hastened to say, "Nay, be comforted, Messieurs! his Majesty is always pale when he is angry."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE ADVISERS.

The king left Madame in a state of agitation which it would have been difficult even for himself to have explained. It is impossible, in fact, to explain the secret play of those strange sympathies which suddenly and apparently without any cause are excited, after many years passed in the greatest calmness and indifference, by two hearts destined to love each other. Why had Louis formerly disdained, almost hated, Madame? Why did he now find the same woman so beautiful, so captivating; and why were his thoughts not only occupied, but still more why were they so occupied about her? Why, in fact, had Madame, whose eyes and mind were sought for in another direction, shown during the last week towards the king a semblance of favor which might encourage a hope of greater intimacy?

It must not be supposed that Louis proposed to himself any plan of seduction. The tie which united Madame to his brother was, or at least would seem to him, an insuperable barrier; he was even too far removed from that barrier to perceive its existence. But on the downward path of those passions in which the heart rejoices, towards which youth impels us, no one can say where he will stop, — not even he who has in advance calculated all the chances of success or failure. As for Madame, her regard for the king may easily be explained; she was young, a coquette, and ardently fond of inspiring

admiration. Hers was one of those buoyant, impetuous natures, which upon a stage would pass through coals of fire to obtain applause from the spectators. It was not surprising, then, that by a sort of progression, after having been adored by Buckingham and by De Guiche, who was superior to Buckingham, — even if it were only from that great merit so much appreciated by women, that is to say, novelty, — it was not surprising, then, we say, that the princess should raise her ambition to being admired by the king, who not only was the first person in the realm, but was one of the handsomest and wittiest men in it.

As for the sudden passion with which Louis was inspired for his sister-in-law, physiology would perhaps supply the explanation of it by some hackneyed commonplace reasons, and Nature from some of her mysterious affinities. Madame had the most beautiful black eyes in the world; Louis, eyes as beautiful, but blue. Madame was laughter-loving and unreserved in her manners; Louis, melancholy and discreet. Summoned to meet each other for the first time upon the grounds of interest and a common curiosity, these two opposite natures were mutually influenced by the contact of their reciprocal contradictions of character. Louis, when he returned to his own rooms, acknowledged to himself that Madame was the most bewitching woman of his court. Madame, left alone, delightedly thought that she had made a great impression on the king. This feeling with her, however, must remain passive, while the king could not but act with all the natural vehemence of the heated fancies of a young man, and of a young man who has but to express a wish and it is executed.

The first thing the king did was to announce to Monsieur that everything was quietly arranged, — that Madame

had the greatest respect, the sincerest affection for him; but that she was of a proud and sensitive character, and that her susceptibilities were so acute as to require very careful management.

Monsieur replied, in the half-sour tone of voice which he generally adopted with his brother, that he could not very well understand the susceptibilities of a woman whose conduct might, in his opinion, expose her to censorious remarks; and that if any one had a right to feel wounded, it was he, Monsieur himself, to whom that right incontestably belonged.

To this the king replied in a sharp tone of voice, which showed the interest he took in his sister-in-law, "Thank Heaven, Madame is above censure."

"The censure of others certainly, I admit," said Monsieur; "but not above mine, I presume."

"Well," said the king, "all I have to say, brother, is that Madame's conduct does not deserve your censure. She certainly is heedless and peculiar in her ways, but professes the best feelings. The English character is not always well understood in France, and the liberty of English manners sometimes surprises those who do not know the extent to which this liberty is due to innocence."

"Ah!" said Monsieur, more and more piqued, "from the very moment when your Majesty absolves my wife, whom I accuse, my wife is not guilty, and I have nothing more to say."

"My brother," replied the king, hastily, for he felt the voice of conscience murmuring softly in his heart that Monsieur was not altogether wrong, "what I have said, and, above all, what I have done, was only for your happiness. I was told that you complained of a want of confidence or attention on Madame's part, and I did not

wish your uneasiness to be prolonged any further. It is part of my duty to watch over your household, as over that of the humblest of my subjects. I have seen, therefore, with the sincerest pleasure, that your apprehensions have no foundation."

"And," continued Monsieur, in an inquiring tone, and fixing his eyes upon his brother, "what your Majesty has discovered for Madame, — and I bow myself to your royal wisdom, — have you also verified it for those who have been the cause of the scandal of which I complain?"

"You are right, brother," said the king; "I will consider that point."

These words comprised an order as well as a consolation; the prince felt it to be so, and withdrew. As for Louis, he went to seek his mother again; for he felt that he had need of a more complete absolution than that which he had just received from his brother. Anne of Austria did not entertain for M. de Guiche the same reasons for indulgence that she had had for Buckingham. She perceived, at the very first words he pronounced, that Louis was not disposed to be severe, and she became so. It was one of the usual stratagems of the good queen, in order to succeed in ascertaining the truth. But Louis was no longer in his apprenticeship; already for more than a year past he had been king, and during that year he had had time to learn how to dissemble. Listening to Anne of Austria in order to permit her to disclose her own thoughts, testifying his approval only by look and by gesture, he became convinced, from certain profound glances and certain skilful insinuations, that the queen, so clear-sighted in matters of gallantry, had, if not guessed, at least suspected, his weakness for Madame. Of all his auxiliaries, Anne of Austria would be the most important to secure; of all his enemies, Anne of Austria

would be the most dangerous. Louis therefore changed his manœuvres. He complained of Madame; absolved Monsieur; listened to what his mother had to say of De Guiche, as he had previously listened to what she had had to say of Buckingham; and then, when he saw that she thought she had gained a complete victory over him, he left her.

The whole of the court, that is to say, all the favorites and more intimate associates, — and they were numerous, since there were already five masters, — were assembled in the evening for the repetition of the ballet. This interval had been occupied by poor De Guiche in receiving sundry visits. Among the number was one which he hoped for and feared to nearly an equal extent. It was that of the Chevalier de Lorraine. About three o'clock in the afternoon the chevalier entered De Guiche's rooms. His looks were most assuring. Monsieur, he said to De Guiche, was in an excellent humor, and no one could say that the slightest cloud had passed across the conjugal sky. Besides, Monsieur was not one to bear ill-will.

For a very long time past, during his residence at the court, the Chevalier de Lorraine had decided that of the two sons of Louis XIII. Monsieur was the one who had inherited the father's character, — an uncertain, irresolute character, impulsively good, evilly disposed at bottom, but certainly a cipher for his friends. He had especially cheered De Guiche by pointing out to him that Madame would before long succeed in governing her husband, and that consequently that man would govern Monsieur who should succeed in influencing Madame.

To this, De Guiche, full of mistrust and presence of mind, had replied, "Yes, Chevalier; but I believe Madame to be a very dangerous person."

"In what respect?"

"In that she has perceived that Monsieur is not very passionately inclined towards women."

"Quite true," said the Chevalier de Lorraine, laughing.

"In that case Madame will choose the first one who approaches, in order to make him the object of her preference, and to bring back her husband by jealousy."

"Deep! deep!" exclaimed the chevalier.

"But true!" replied De Guiche.

But neither the one nor the other expressed his real thought. De Guiche, at the very moment when he thus attacked Madame's character, mentally asked her forgiveness from the bottom of his heart; the chevalier, while admiring De Guiche's penetration, led him blindfolded to the brink of the precipice. De Guiche then questioned him more directly upon the effect produced by the scene of the morning, and upon the still more serious effect produced by the scene at dinner.

"But I have already told you that they are all laughing at it," replied the Chevalier de Lorraine; "and Monsieur himself, first of all."

"Yet," hazarded De Guiche, "I have heard that the king paid Madame a visit."

"Yes, precisely so. Madame was the only one who did not laugh, and the king went to her in order to make her laugh too."

"So that —"

"So that nothing is altered in the arrangements of the day."

"And is there a repetition of the ballet this evening?"

"Certainly."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite so," returned the chevalier.

At this moment of the conversation between the two

young men, Raoul entered, looking full of anxiety. As soon as the chevalier — who had a secret dislike for him, as for every other noble character — perceived him enter, he rose from his seat.

"What do you advise me to do, then?" inquired De Guiche of the chevalier.

"I advise you to go to sleep with perfect tranquillity, my dear count."

"And my advice, De Guiche," said Raoul, "would be the very opposite."

"What is that?"

"To mount your horse and set off at once for one of your estates. On your arrival, follow the chevalier's advice, if you like; and what is more, you can sleep there as long and as tranquilly as may be agreeable to you."

"What! go away?" exclaimed the chevalier, feigning surprise; "why should De Guiche go away?"

"Because — and you particularly cannot be ignorant of it — because every one is talking about the scene which has passed between Monsieur and De Guiche."

De Guiche turned pale.

"Not at all," replied the chevalier, "not at all; and you have been wrongly informed, M. de Bragelonne."

"I have been perfectly well informed, on the contrary, Monsieur," replied Raoul; "and the advice I give De Guiche is that of a friend."

During this discussion De Guiche, somewhat shaken, looked alternately first at one and then at the other of his advisers. He inwardly felt that a game important in all its consequences for the rest of his life was being played at that moment.

"Is it not the fact," said the chevalier, putting the question to the count himself, — "is it not the fact, De

Guiche, that the scene was not so stormy as M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne seems to think? Moreover, he was not himself there."

"Monsieur," persisted Raoul, "stormy or not, it is not precisely of the scene itself that I am speaking, but of the consequences that may ensue. I know that Monsieur has threatened, and I know that Madame has been in tears."

"Madame in tears!" exclaimed De Guiche, imprudently clasping his hands.

"Ah, indeed!" said the chevalier, laughing, "this is indeed a circumstance with which I was not acquainted. You are decidedly better informed than I am, M. de Bragelonne."

"And it is precisely because I am better informed than yourself, Chevalier, that I insist upon De Guiche's leaving."

"No, no, once more I regret to differ from you, Monsieur the Viscount, but his departure is unnecessary. Why, indeed, should he leave? Tell us why!"

"The king!"

"The king!" exclaimed De Guiche.

"Yes; I tell you the king has taken up the affair."

"Bah!" said the chevalier; "the king likes De Guiche, and particularly his father. Reflect that if the count were to leave, it would be an admission that he had done something which merited rebuke."

"Why so?"

"No doubt of it, when one runs away, it is either from guilt or from fear."

"Or because a man is offended because he is wrongfully accused," said Bragelonne. "We will assign as a reason for his departure that he feels hurt and injured, — nothing will be easier; we will say that we both did our ut-

most to keep him, and you at least will not be telling an untruth. Come, De Guiche, you are innocent; and being so, the scene of to-day must have wounded you. So set off, De Guiche! be off!"

"No, De Guiche, remain where you are," said the chevalier,—"precisely as M. de Bragelonne has put it, because you are innocent. Once more, forgive me, Viscount; but my opinion is the very opposite to your own."

"And you are at perfect liberty to maintain it, Monsieur; but observe that the exile which De Guiche will voluntarily impose upon himself will be of short duration He can terminate it whenever he pleases, and returning from his voluntary exile, he will meet with smiles from all lips, while, on the contrary, the anger of the king may draw down a storm upon his head, the end of which no one can foresee."

The chevalier smiled, and murmured to himself, "*Pardieu!* that is the very thing I wish;" and at the same time he shrugged his shoulders,—a movement which did not escape the count, who dreaded, if he left the court, to seem to yield to a feeling of fear.

"No, no; I have decided," he exclaimed. "Bragelonne, I stay."

"I prophesy, then," said Raoul, sadly, "that misfortune will befall you, De Guiche."

"I, too, am a prophet, but not a prophet of evil; on the contrary, Count, I say to you remain."

"Are you sure," inquired De Guiche, "that the repetition of the ballet still takes place?"

"Quite sure."

"Well, you see, Raoul," continued De Guiche, endeavoring to smile, "you see that the court is not so very sorrowful, or so readily disposed to internal dissensions, when

dancing is carried on with such assiduity. Come, acknowledge that," said the count to Raoul, who shook his head, replying, —

"I have nothing further to say."

"But really," inquired the chevalier, curious to learn from what source Raoul had obtained his information, the exactitude of which he was inwardly forced to admit, "you say you are well informed, Monsieur the Viscount. How can you be better informed than myself, who am one of the prince's most intimate companions?"

"Monsieur," said Raoul, "to such a declaration I submit. You certainly ought to be perfectly well informed, I acknowledge; and as a man of honor is incapable of saying anything but what he knows to be true, or of speaking otherwise than what he thinks, I shall say no more, but confess myself defeated, and leave you in possession of the field of battle." Whereupon Raoul, who now seemed only to care to be left quiet, threw himself upon a large couch, while the count summoned his servants to aid him in dressing.

The chevalier, finding that time was passing away, wished to leave; but he feared, too, that Raoul, left alone with De Guiche, might yet influence him to change his resolution. He therefore made use of his last resource. "Madame," he said, "will be brilliant; she appears tonight in her costume of Pomona."

"Ah, that is true!" exclaimed the count.

"And she has just given directions accordingly," continued the chevalier. "You know, M. de Bragelonne that the king is to appear as Spring."

"It will be admirable," said De Guiche; "and that is a better reason for me to remain than any you have yet given, because I am to appear as Autumn, and shall have to dance with Madame. I cannot absent myself without

the king's orders, since my departure would interrupt the ballet."

"I," said the chevalier, "am to be only a simple *égypan;* it is true that I am a bad dancer and my legs are not well made. Monsieur, *au revoir!* Do not forget the basket of fruit which you are to offer to Pomona, Count!"

"Oh, be assured," said De Guiche, enraptured, "I shall forget nothing."

"I am now quite certain that he will not go away," murmured the Chevalier de Lorraine to himself as he went out.

Raoul, when the chevalier had left, did not even attempt to dissuade his friend, for he felt that it would be trouble thrown away; he merely observed to the count, in his melancholy and melodious voice: "You are entering upon a most dangerous passion, Count. I know you well; you go to extremes in everything, and she whom you love does so too. Admitting for an instant that she should come to love you —"

"Oh, never!" exclaimed De Guiche.

"Why do you say never?"

"Because it would be a great misfortune for both of us."

"In that case, my dear friend, instead of regarding you as simply imprudent, I cannot but consider you as absolutely mad."

"Why?"

"Are you perfectly sure — mind, answer me frankly — that you desire nothing of her whom you love?"

"Oh, yes; quite sure!"

"Love her then at a distance."

"What! at a distance?"

"Certainly; what matters being present or absent,

since you expect nothing from her? Love a portrait, a remembrance!"

"Raoul!"

"Love a shadow, an illusion, a chimera; love love itself, by giving a name to your ideal. Ah! you turn away; your servants approach; I shall say no more. In good or bad fortune, De Guiche, depend upon me."

"Indeed I shall do so."

"Very well, that is all I had to say to you. Spare no pains in your person, De Guiche, and look your very best. Adieu!"

"You will not be present, then, at the repetition of the ballet, Viscount!"

"No; I have a visit to pay in town. Farewell, De Guiche!"

The reception was to take place in the king's apartments. In the first place, there were the queens, then Madame, and a few ladies of honor who had been selected. A great number of courtiers, also carefully selected, occupied the time before the dancing began in conversing, as people knew how to converse in those times. None of the ladies who had received invitations appeared in the costumes of the *fête*, as the Chevalier de Lorraine had predicted; but many conversations took place about the rich and ingenious toilets designed by different painters for the ballet of "The Demigods,"—for thus were termed the kings and queens of whom Fontainebleau was about to become the Pantheon. Monsieur arrived, holding in his hand a drawing representing his character; he still looked somewhat uneasy. He bowed most courteously and affectionately to the young queen and to his mother, but saluted Madame almost cavalierly, and then turned upon his heel. This movement and his coldness of manner were observed by all. M. de

Guiche indemnified the princess by a look of passionate devotion; and it must be admitted that Madame, as she raised her eyes, returned it to him with usury. It is unquestionable that De Guiche had never looked so handsome, for Madame's glance had in some way lighted up the features of the son of the Maréchal de Grammont

The king's sister-in-law felt a storm mustering above her head; she felt, too, that during the whole of the day, so pregnant with future events, she had acted unjustly, if not very treasonably, towards one who loved her with such a depth of devotion. The moment seemed to her to have arrived for an acknowledgment to the poor victim of the injustice of the morning. Her heart spoke, and murmured the name of De Guiche; the count was sincerely pitied, and accordingly gained the victory over all others. Neither Monsieur nor the king nor the Duke of Buckingham was any longer thought of; and De Guiche at that moment reigned without a rival. Monsieur also looked very handsome; still he could not be compared to the count. It is well known indeed, all women say so — that a very wide difference invariably exists between the good looks of a lover and those of a husband. Besides, in the present case, after Monsieur had left, and after the courteous and affectionate recognition of the young queen and of the queen-mother and the careless and indifferent notice of Madame, which all the courtiers had remarked, — all these incidents, we say, in that combination gave the lover the advantage over the husband. Monsieur was too great a personage to notice these details. Nothing is so certain as a well-settled idea of superiority to prove the inferiority of the man who has that opinion of himself.

The king arrived. Every one looked for what might possibly happen, in the glance which began to bestir the

world, like the brow of Jupiter Tonans. Louis had none of his brother's gloominess, but was perfectly radiant. Having examined a greater part of the drawings which were displayed for his inspection on every side, he gave his opinion or his criticism upon them, and in this manner rendered some happy and others unhappy by a single word. Suddenly his glance, which was smilingly directed towards Madame, detected the silent correspondence which was established between the princess and the count. He bit his royal lips, but when he opened them again to utter a few commonplace remarks, he said, advancing towards the queens: "Mesdames, I have just been informed that everything is now prepared at Fontainebleau, in accordance with my directions." A murmur of satisfaction arose from the different groups, and the king perceived on every face the greatest anxiety to receive an invitation for the festivities. "I shall leave to-morrow," he added. Whereupon there was the profoundest silence in the assemblage. "And I invite," said the king, finishing, "all those who are now present to get ready to accompany me."

Smiling faces were now everywhere visible, with the exception of Monsieur, who seemed to retain his ill-humor. The different noblemen and ladies of the court thereupon defiled before the king, one after the other, in order to thank his Majesty for the great honor of the invitation. When it came to De Guiche's turn, the king said, "Ah, Monsieur, I did not see you."

The count bowed, and Madame turned pale. De Guiche was about to open his lips to express his thanks, when the king said, "Count, this is the season for the second sowing of crops; I am sure that your tenants in Normandy will be glad to see you upon your estate."

The king, after this cruel blow, turned his back to the

unhappy man, whose turn it was now to become pale; he advanced a few steps towards the king, forgetting that his Majesty is never spoken to except in reply to questions addressed. "I have perhaps misunderstood your Majesty," he stammered out.

The king turned his head slightly, and with a cold and stern glance, which plunged like a sword relentlessly into the hearts of those under disgrace, repeated, "I said, Retire to your estates," allowing every syllable to fall slowly one by one.

A cold perspiration bedewed the count's face; his hands convulsively opened; and his hat, which he held between his trembling fingers, fell to the ground. Louis sought his mother's glance, as though to show her that he was master; he sought his brother's triumphant look, as if to ask him if he were satisfied with the vengeance taken; and lastly, his eyes fell upon Madame. But the princess was talking and smiling with Madame de Noailles. She had heard nothing, or rather pretended to have heard nothing. The Chevalier de Lorraine looked on, also, with one of those looks of settled hostility which seem to give to a man's glance the power of a lever when it raises an obstacle, wrests it away, and casts it to a distance.

M. de Guiche was left alone in the king's cabinet, the whole of the company having departed. Shadows danced before his eyes. He suddenly broke through the fixed despair which overwhelmed him, and flew to hide himself in his own rooms, where Raoul still awaited him, confident in his own sad presentiments.

"Well," murmured the latter, seeing his friend enter, bareheaded, with a wild gaze and tottering steps.

"Yes, yes, it is true," said De Guiche, unable to utter more, and falling exhausted upon the couch.

"And she?" inquired Raoul.

"She!" exclaimed his unhappy friend, as he raised his hand, clinched in anger towards heaven. "She!—"

"What did she say and do?"

"She said that her dress suited her admirably, and then she laughed." A fit of hysteric laughter seemed to shatter the nerves of the poor exile; for he fell backwards, completely overcome.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

FONTAINEBLEAU.

For four days every kind of enchantment brought together in the magnificent gardens of Fontainebleau had converted this spot into a place of delight. M. Colbert seemed gifted with ubiquity. In the morning there were the accounts of the previous night's expenses to settle; during the day, programmes, essays, enlistments, payments. M. Colbert had secured four million livres, and disposed of them with wise economy He was dismayed at the expenses which mythology involved; every wood-nymph, every dryad, did not cost less than a hundred livres a day. The dress alone amounted to three hundred livres. The expense for powder and sulphur for fireworks amounted, every night, to a hundred thousand livres. In addition to these, the illuminations on the borders of the sheet of water cost thirty thousand livres every evening. The *fêtes* had been magnificent; and Colbert could not restrain his delight. From time to time he noticed Madame and the king setting forth on hunting expeditions, or preparing for the reception of different fantastic personages, — solemn ceremonials, which had been extemporized a fortnight before, and in which Madame's sparkling wit and the king's magnificence were equally displayed.

For Madame, the heroine of the *fête*, replied to the addresses of the deputations from unknown races, — Garamanthians, Scythians, Hyperboreans, Caucasians, and

Patagonians, — who seemed to issue from the ground for the purpose of approaching her with their congratulations; and upon every representative of these races the king bestowed a diamond, or some other article of value. Then the deputies, in verses more or less amusing, compared the king to the sun, and Madame to Phœbe, the sun's sister; and the queen and Monsieur were no more spoken of than if the king had married Madame Henrietta of England, and not Maria Theresa of Austria. The happy pair, hand in hand, imperceptibly pressing each other's fingers, drank in deep draughts the sweet beverage of adulation, by which the attractions of youth, beauty, power, and love are enhanced.

Every one at Fontainebleau was amazed at the extent of the influence which Madame had so rapidly acquired over the king, and whispered among themselves that Madame was, in point of fact, the true queen; and certainly the king himself proclaimed it by his every thought, word, and look. He formed his wishes, he drew his inspirations from Madame's eyes, and his delight was unbounded when Madame deigned to smile upon him. And was Madame, on her side, intoxicated with the power she wielded, as she beheld every one at her feet? She herself could not tell; but what she did know was that she could frame no wish, and that she felt herself to be perfectly happy.

The result of all these changes which emanated from the royal will was that Monsieur, instead of being the second person in the kingdom, had in reality become the third. And it was now far worse than in the time when De Guiche's guitars were heard in Madame's apartments; for then, at least, Monsieur had the satisfaction of frightening away those who annoyed him. But since the departure of the enemy, who had been driven away through

his alliance with the king, Monsieur had to submit to a burden heavier than his former one, but still very different. Every evening Madame returned home quite exhausted. Horse-riding, bathing in the Seine, spectacles, dinners under the leafy covert of the trees, balls on the banks of the grand canal, concerts. — all this would have been sufficient to kill, not a slight and delicate woman, but the strongest Swiss porter in the *château*. It is true that with regard to dancing, concerts, and promenades a woman is far stronger than the most robust son of the thirty cantons. But however great a woman's strength may be, there is a limit to it, and she cannot hold out long under such a system. As for Monsieur, he had not even the satisfaction of witnessing Madame's abdication of her royalty in the evening, for she lived in the royal pavilion with the young queen and the queen-mother. As a matter of course, M. le Chevalier de Lorraine did not quit Monsieur, and did not fail to distil his drops of gall into every wound the latter received.

The result was that Monsieur — who had at first been in the highest spirits, completely restored since Guiche's departure — subsided into his melancholy state three days after the court was installed at Fontainebleau. Now it happened that one day about two o'clock in the afternoon Monsieur, who had risen late and had bestowed upon his toilet more than his usual attention, — it happened, we repeat, that Monsieur, who had not heard of any plans having been arranged for the day, formed the project of collecting his own court, and of carrying Madame off with him to take supper at Moret, where he possessed a charming country-house. He accordingly went to the queens' pavilion, and was astonished on entering to find none of the royal servants in attendance. Quite alone, therefore, he entered the rooms, — a door on

the left opening to Madame's apartment, the one on the right to the young queen's. In his wife's apartment Monsieur was informed by a sempstress who was working there, that every one had left at eleven o'clock to go and bathe in the Seine, that a grand *fête* was to be made of the expedition, that all the carriages had been brought to the park gates, and that they had all set out more than an hour before.

"Very good," said Monsieur; "the idea is a good one. The heat is very oppressive, and I have no objection to bathe too."

He summoned his servants, but no one came. He summoned those in attendance on Madame, but everybody had gone out. He then went to the stables, where he was informed by a groom that there were no carriages of any description. He then desired that a couple of horses should be saddled, — one for himself, and the other for his valet. The groom told him politely that there were no more horses. Monsieur, pale with anger, again went up to the queens' apartments, and penetrated as far as Anne of Austria's oratory, where he perceived, through the half-opened tapestry-hangings, his young sister-in-law on her knees before the queen-mother and apparently weeping. He had not been either seen or heard. He cautiously approached the opening and listened, the sight of so much grief having aroused his curiosity. Not only was the young queen weeping, but she was complaining also. "Yes," she said, "the king neglects me; the king devotes himself to pleasures and amusements only, in which I have no share."

"Patience, patience, my daughter!" said Anne of Austria, in Spanish; and then, also in Spanish, added some words of advice which Monsieur did not understand. The queen replied by accusations, mingled with sobs and

tears, among which Monsieur often distinguished the word *banos*, which Maria Theresa emphasized with spiteful anger.

"The baths," said Monsieur to himself, — "it seems it is the baths that have put her out," and he endeavored to put together the disconnected phrases which he had been able to understand from time to time. It was easy to see that the queen was complaining bitterly, and that, if Anne of Austria did not console her, she at least endeavored to do so. Monsieur was afraid to be detected listening at the door, and he therefore adopted the expedient of coughing. The two queens turned round at the sound, and Monsieur entered.

At the sight of the prince the young queen rose precipitately and dried her tears. Monsieur knew the people he had to deal with too well to ask questions, and was naturally too polite to remain silent; and he accordingly saluted them. The queen-mother smiled pleasantly at him, saying, "What do you want, my son?"

"I? — nothing," stammered Monsieur; "I was looking for — "

"Whom?"

"I was looking for Madame."

"Madame is at the baths."

"And the king?" said Monsieur, in a tone which made the queen tremble.

"The king also, and the whole court as well," replied Anne of Austria.

"Without you, Madame?" said Monsieur.

"Oh! I," said the young queen, — "I frighten all those who amuse themselves."

"And I, too, it seems," said Monsieur.

Anne of Austria silently made a sign to her daughter-in-law, who withdrew weeping.

Monsieur's brows contracted as he remarked, "What a cheerless house! What do you think of it, mother?"

"Why, no; everybody here is pleasure-hunting."

"Yes, indeed; that is the very thing which makes those dull who do not care for pleasure."

"In what a tone you say that, my dear Philip!"

"Upon my word, Madame, I speak as I think."

"Explain yourself. What is the matter?"

"Ask my sister-in law, rather, who just now was relating all her grievances to you."

"Her grievances! What —"

"Yes, I was listening, — accidentally, I confess, but still I listened, — so that I heard only too well my sister complain of those famous baths of Madame —"

"What folly!"

"No, no, no; people are not always foolish when they weep. The queen said *banos;* does not that mean baths?"

"I repeat, my son," said Anne of Austria, "that your sister-in-law is most childishly jealous."

"In that case, Madame," replied the prince, "I too must with great humility accuse myself of possessing the same defect which she has."

"You also, my son?"

"Certainly."

"Are you too really jealous of these baths?"

"And why not, Madame, when the king goes to the baths with my wife, and does not take the queen? Why not, when Madame goes to the baths with the king, and does not do me the honor to tell me of it? And you require my sister-in-law to be satisfied, and require me to be satisfied too."

"But, my dear Philip," said Anne of Austria, "you are raving. You have driven the Duke of Buckingham

away; you have had M. de Guiche exiled; do you now wish to send the king away from Fontainebleau?"

"I do not pretend to anything of the kind, Madame," said Monsieur, bitterly; "but at least I can withdraw, and I shall do so."

"Jealous of the king, — jealous of your brother?"

"Yes, Madame, I am jealous of the king, — of my own brother; and very jealous too."

"Really, Monsieur," exclaimed Anne of Austria, affecting to be indignant and angry, "I begin to believe that you are mad, and a sworn enemy to my repose! I therefore abandon the place to you, for I have no means of defending myself against such wild conceptions."

She arose and left Monsieur a prey to a furious fit of passion. He remained for a moment completely bewildered; then, recovering himself in order completely to regain his strength, he again went to the stables, found the groom, once more asked him for a carriage or a horse, and upon his replying that there was neither the one nor the other, snatched a long whip from the hand of a stable-boy and began to pursue the poor devil of a groom all round the servants' courtyard, whipping him all the while in spite of his cries and his excuses; then, quite out of breath, covered with perspiration, and trembling in every limb, he returned to his own apartments, broke in pieces his most beautiful specimens of porcelain, and then got into bed, booted and spurred as he was, crying out for help.

CHAPTER XL.

THE BATH.

At Valvins, beneath the impenetrable shade of flowering osiers and willows, which, as they bent down their green heads, dipped the extremities of their branches in the blue waters, a long and flat bottomed boat with ladders covered with long blue curtains served as a refuge for the bathing Dianas, who, as they left the water, were watched by twenty plumed Actæons, who eagerly and full of desire galloped up and down the moss-grown and sweet-smelling banks of the river. But Diana herself — even the modest Diana, clothed in her long chlamys — was less chaste, less impenetrable, than Madame, young and beautiful as the goddess herself. For, notwithstanding the fine tunic of the huntress, her round and white knee could be seen, and notwithstanding the sonorous quiver, her brown shoulders could be detected; whereas in Madame's case a long white veil enveloped her, wrapping her round and round a hundred times as she resigned herself into the hands of her female attendants, and thus was rendered inaccessible to the most indiscreet as well as to the most penetrating gaze. When she ascended the ladder, the poets who were present, — and all were poets when Madame was the subject of discussion, — the twenty poets who were galloping about stopped and with one voice exclaimed that pearls, and not drops of water, were falling from her person, to be lost again in the happy river. The king, the centre of

these effusions and of this homage, imposed silence upon those expatiators, whose raptures were inexhaustible, and rode away for fear of offending even under the silken curtains the modesty of the woman and the dignity of the princess. A great blank thereupon ensued in the scene, and a perfect silence in the boat. From the movements on board — from the flutterings and agitations of the curtains — the goings to and fro of the female attendants engaged in their duties could be guessed

The king smilingly listened to the conversation of the gentlemen around him, but it could easily be perceived that he gave but little if any attention to their remarks. In fact, hardly had the sound of the rings sliding along the curtain-rods announced that Madame was dressed and that the goddess was about to make her appearance, than the king, returning to his former post immediately, and running quite close to the river-bank, gave the signal for all those to approach whose attendance or pleasure summoned them to Madame's side. The pages hurried forward, conducting the led horses, the carriages, which had remained sheltered under the trees, advanced towards the tent, followed by a crowd of servants, bearers, and female attendants, who while their masters had been bathing had mutually exchanged their own observations, their critical remarks, and the discussion of matters of interest, — the fugitive journal of that period, of which no record is preserved, not even by the waters, the mirror of individuals, echo of conversations, — witnesses whom Heaven has hurried into immensity as he has hurried the actors themselves into eternity.

All this crowd of people swarming upon the banks of the river, without reckoning the groups of peasants attracted by their anxiety to see the king and the princess, occasioned for many minutes the most disorderly but the

most agreeable confusion imaginable. The king dismounted from his horse, — a movement which was imitated by all the courtiers, — and offered his hand to Madame, whose rich riding-habit displayed her elegant figure, which was set off to great advantage by that garment, made of fine woollen cloth embroidered with silver. Her hair, still damp, and blacker than jet, hung in heavy masses upon her white and delicate neck. Joy and health sparkled in her beautiful eyes; composed, and yet full of energy, she inhaled the air in deep draughts under the embroidered parasol which was borne by one of her pages. Nothing could be more charming, more graceful, more poetical, than these two figures buried under the rose-colored shade of the parasol, — the king, whose white teeth were displayed in continual smiles; and Madame, whose black eyes sparkled like two carbuncles in the glittering reflection of the changing hues of the silk.

When Madame approached her horse, — a magnificent Andalusian pacer of spotless white, somewhat heavy, perhaps, but with a spirited and slender head, in which the mixture so happily combined of Arabian and Spanish blood could be readily traced, and whose long tail swept the ground, — and affected difficulty in mounting, the king took her in his arms in such a manner that Madame's arm was clasped like a circlet of fire around the king's neck. Louis, as he withdrew, involuntarily touched with his lips the arm, which was not withheld, and the princess having thanked her royal equerry, every one sprang to his saddle at once. The king and Madame drew aside to allow the carriages, the outriders, and runners to pass by. A fair proportion of the cavaliers, released from the restraint which etiquette had imposed on them, gave the rein to their horses, and darted after

the carriages which bore the maids of honor, as blooming as so many Oreades around Diana; and the whirlwind, laughing, chattering, and noisy, passed onward.

The king and Madame kept their horses in hand at a foot-pace. Behind his Majesty and the princess his sister-in-law, certain of the courtiers — either seriously disposed, or anxious to be within reach or under the eyes of the king — followed at a respectful distance, restraining their impatient horses, regulating their pace by the steeds of the king and Madame, and abandoned themselves to all the delight and gratification which is to be found in the conversation of clever people, who can with perfect courtesy utter a thousand of the most atrocious aspersions on their neighbors. In their stifled laughter and in the little reticences of their sardonic humor, Monsieur, the poor absentee, was not spared. But they pitied and bewailed greatly the fate of De Guiche; and it must be confessed that their compassion, so far as he was concerned, was not misplaced.

Meanwhile the king and Madame, having breathed their horses, and repeated a hundred times over such remarks as the courtiers, who made them talk, had suggested to them, set off at a hand-gallop, and the shady avenues of the forest resounded to the heavy footfall of the mounted party. To the murmured conversations — to the remarks made in the character of confidential communications, and to the observations exchanged as it were mysteriously — succeeded the loudest bursts of laughter; from the very outriders to royalty itself merriment seemed to spread. Every one began to laugh and to cry out. The magpies and the jays flew away, uttering their guttural cries, beneath the waving arches of the oaks; the cuckoo stayed his monotonous cry in the recesses of the forest; the chaffinches and tomtits flew

away in clouds; while the roebucks and the fallow-deer bounded away, terrified, into the midst of the thickets. This crowd, spreading widely joy, confusion, and light wherever it passed, was preceded, it may be said, to the château by its own clamor.

As the king and Madame entered the village, they were both received by the general acclamations of the crowd. Madame hastened to look for Monsieur, for she instinctively understood that he had been far too long kept from sharing in this enjoyment. The king went to rejoin the queens; he knew he owed them — one especially — a compensation for his long absence. But Madame was not admitted to Monsieur's apartments, and she was informed that Monsieur was asleep. The king, instead of being met by Maria Theresa smiling, as was usual with her, found Anne of Austria in the gallery, watching for his return, who advanced to meet him, and taking him by the hand led him to her own apartment. No one ever knew what they said to each other, or rather what the queen-mother said to Louis XIV., but it certainly might easily be guessed from the annoyed expression of the king's face as he came away from that interview.

But we, whose mission it is to interpret all things, as it is also to communicate our interpretations to our readers, — we should fail in our duty, if we were to leave them in ignorance of the result of this interview. It will be found sufficiently detailed — at least we hope so — in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE BUTTERFLY-CHASE.

The king, on retiring to his apartments to give some directions and to arrange his ideas, found on his toilet-glass a small note, the handwriting of which seemed disguised. He opened it and read. "Come quickly! I have a thousand things to say to you." The king and Madame had not been separated a sufficiently long time for these thousand things to be the result of the three thousand which they had been saying to each other during the journey which separated Valvins from Fontainebleau. The confused and hurried character of the note, too, gave the king a great deal to reflect upon. He occupied himself but slightly with his toilet, and set off to pay his visit to Madame. The princess, who did not wish to have the appearance of expecting him, had gone into the gardens with all her ladies. When the king was informed that Madame had left her apartments to go out for a walk, he collected all the gentlemen he could find at hand, and invited them to follow him to the gardens. Madame was engaged in chasing butterflies on a large lawn bordered with heliotrope and flowering broom. She was looking on, as the most adventurous and youngest of her ladies ran to and fro, and with her back turned to the hedge very impatiently awaited the arrival of the king, to whom she had given the rendezvous The sound of many feet upon the gravel-walk made her turn round. Louis XIV. was bareheaded; he had struck down with his cane a peacock-

butterfly, which M. de Saint-Aignan had picked up from the grass quite stunned.

"You see, Madame," said the king, as he approached her, "that I too am hunting for you;" and then, turning to the gentlemen who formed his retinue, said, "Messieurs, see if each of you cannot obtain as much for these ladies," — a remark which was a signal for all to retire. And thereupon a curious spectacle might be observed: old and corpulent courtiers ran after butterflies, losing their hats as they ran, and with their raised canes cutting down the myrtles and the furze, as they would have cut down the Spaniards.

The king offered Madame his arm, and they both selected, as a centre of observation, a bench with a roofing of moss, — a kind of hut roughly designed by the modest genius of some gardener who had introduced the picturesque and the fanciful amid the formal style of gardening of that period. This sheltered retreat, covered with nasturtiums and climbing roses, screened a bench without a back; so that the spectators within, insulated in the middle of the lawn, saw and were seen on every side, but could not be heard, without perceiving those who might approach for the purpose of listening. Seated thus, the king made a sign of encouragement to the hunters; and then, as if he were engaged with Madame in a dissertation upon the butterfly, which he had thrust through with a gold pin and fastened on his hat, said to her, "How admirably we are placed here for conversation!"

"Yes, Sire, for I wished to be heard by you alone, and yet to be seen by every one."

"And I also," said Louis.

"My note surprised you?"

"Terrified me, rather. But what I have to tell you is more important."

"Oh, no, indeed! Do you know that Monsieur has closed his door against me?"

"Why so?"

"Can you not guess why?"

"Ah, Madame! in that case we have both the same thing to say to each other"

"What has happened to you, then?"

"You wish me to begin?"

"Yes, for I have told you all."

"Well, then, as soon as I returned, I found my mother waiting for me, and she led me away to her own apartments."

"Oh! the queen-mother?" said Madame, with some anxiety; "that is serious."

"Indeed it is, for this is what she told me — But in the first place allow me to preface what I have to say with one remark. Has Monsieur ever spoken to you about me?"

"Often."

"Has he ever spoken to you about his jealousy?"

"Oh, more frequently still!"

"Of his jealousy of me?"

"No, but of Buckingham and De Guiche."

"Well, Madame, Monsieur's present idea is to be jealous of myself."

"Really," replied the princess, smiling archly.

"And it really seems to me," continued the king, "that we have never given any ground —"

"Never! at least I have not. But how did you learn about Monsieur's jealousy?"

"My mother represented to me that Monsieur entered her apartments like a madman; that he uttered a thousand complaints against you, and — forgive me for saying it — against your coquetry. It appears that Monsieur indulges in injustice too."

"You are very kind, Sire."

"My mother reassured him; but he pretended that people reassure him too often, and that he had had quite enough of it."

"Would it not be better for him not to make himself uneasy in any way?"

"The very thing I said."

"Confess, Sire, that the world is very wicked. Is it possible that a brother and sister cannot converse together, or take pleasure in each other's society, without giving rise to remarks and suspicions? For indeed, Sire, we are doing no harm, and have no intention of doing any;" and she looked at the king with that proud and provoking glance which kindles desire in the coldest and wisest of men.

"No," sighed Louis; "that is true."

"Know well, Sire, that if this were to continue, I should be obliged to make a disturbance. Do you decide upon our conduct, and say whether it has, or has not, been perfectly correct."

"Oh! certainly, — perfectly correct."

"Often alone together, — for we delight in the same things, — we might possibly be led away into error, but have we done so? I regard you as a brother, and nothing more." The king frowned. She continued. "Your hand, which often meets my own, does not excite in me that agitation and emotion which lovers, for instance —"

"Enough," said the king, in torture, — "enough, I entreat you! You have no pity, — you are killing me."

"What is the matter?"

"In fact, then, you distinctly say that you experience nothing when near me."

"Oh, Sire! I do not say that, — my affection —"

"Enough, Henrietta, I again entreat you! If you believe me to be marble, as you are, undeceive yourself."

"I do not understand you."

"Very well," sighed the king, casting down his eyes. "And so our meetings, the pressure of each other's hands, the looks we have exchanged — Yes, yes; you are right, and I understand your meaning;" and he buried his face in his hands.

"Take care, Sire!" said Madame, hurriedly; "here is M. de Saint-Aignan looking at you."

"Of course," said Louis, angrily; "never even the shadow of liberty, never any sincerity in my intercourse with any one! I imagine I have found a friend, and he is nothing but a spy; a dearer friend, and she is only a — sister!"

Madame was silent, and cast down her eyes. "My husband is jealous," she murmured, in a tone whose charm and sweetness could not be equalled.

"Oh!" exclaimed the king, suddenly, "you are right."

"You see," she said, looking at him in a manner that set his heart on fire, "you are free, you are not suspected; the peace of your house is not disturbed."

"Alas! as yet you know nothing, for the queen is jealous."

"Maria Theresa!"

"Perfectly mad with jealousy! Monsieur's jealousy arises from hers. She was weeping and complaining to my mother, and was reproaching us for those bathing-parties, so pleasant to me."

"And me too," answered Madame by a look.

"When suddenly," continued the king, "Monsieur, who was listening, heard the word *banos*, which the queen pronounced with some degree of bitterness; that awakened his attention. He entered the room, looking

quite wild, broke into the conversation, and began to quarrel with my mother so bitterly that she was obliged to escape from his presence; so that while you have a jealous husband to deal with, I shall have perpetually present before me an inexorable spectre of jealousy, with swollen eyes, a cadaverous face, and sinister looks."

"Poor king!" murmured Madame, letting her hand lightly brush against that of Louis.

Louis retained her hand in his; and in order to press it without exciting suspicion in the spectators, who were not so much taken up with hunting the butterflies that they could not hunt for news and seek to learn some secret from the interview of the king and Madame, he placed the dying butterfly before his sister-in-law, and both bent over it as if to count the thousand eyes on its wings or the particles of golden dust which covered it. But neither of them spoke; however, their hair mingled, their breath united, and their hands feverishly throbbed in each other's grasp. Five minutes passed by in this manner.

CHAPTER XLII.

WHAT WAS CAUGHT IN CHASING BUTTERFLIES.

THE two young people remained for a moment with their heads bent down, bowed as it were beneath the mutual consciousness of nascent love which at twenty years of age gives birth to so many happy fancies. Madame Henrietta gave a side glance from time to time at Louis. Hers was one of those finely organized natures capable of looking inwardly at itself as well as at others at the same moment. She perceived love lying at the bottom of Louis's heart, as a skilful diver sees a pearl at the bottom of the sea. She knew that the king was hesitating, if not in doubt, and that his indolent or timid heart required aid and encouragement. "Consequently?" she said interrogatively, breaking the silence.

"What do you mean?" inquired Louis, after a moment's pause.

"I mean that I shall be obliged to return to the resolution I had formed."

"To what resolution?"

"To that which I have already submitted to your Majesty."

"When?"

"On the very day when we had a certain explanation about Monsieur's jealousies."

"What did you say to me then?" inquired Louis, with some anxiety.

"Do you not remember, Sire?"

"Alas! if it be another cause of unhappiness, I shall recollect it soon enough."

"A cause of unhappiness for myself alone, Sire," replied Madame Henrietta; "but it is a necessary misfortune, and I must submit to it."

"At least, tell me what it is," said the king.

"Absence."

"Still that unkind resolve?"

"Believe me, Sire, I have not formed it without a violent struggle with myself; it is absolutely necessary that I should return to England."

"Never, never will I permit you to leave France," exclaimed the king.

"And yet, Sire," said Madame, affecting a gentle yet sorrowful determination, "nothing is more urgently necessary; nay, more than that, I am persuaded that it is your mother's will that I should do so."

"Will!" exclaimed the king; "my dear sister, that is a very strange expression to use to me."

"Still," replied Madame Henrietta, smilingly, "are you not happy in submitting to the wishes of so good a mother?"

"Enough, I implore you; you rend my very soul!"

"I?"

"Yes; for you speak of your departure with real tranquillity."

"I was not born for happiness, Sire," replied the princess, in a melancholy tone, "and I acquired, in very early life, the habit of seeing my dearest hopes disappointed."

"Do you speak truly?" said the king. "Would your departure cross any one of your cherished thoughts?"

"If I were to say 'Yes,' is it not true, Sire, that you would begin to take your misfortune patiently?"

"How cruel you are!"

"Take care, Sire! some one is coming."

The king looked all round him, and said, "No, there is no one," and then continued: "Come, Henrietta, instead of trying to contend against Monsieur's jealousy by a departure which would kill me," — Henrietta slightly shrugged her shoulders, like a woman unconvinced, — "yes," repeated Louis, "which would kill me, I say, — instead of fixing your mind on this departure, does not your imagination, or rather does not your heart, suggest some expedient?"

"*Mon Dieu*, what is it you wish my heart to suggest?"

"Tell me, how can one prove to another that he is mistaken in his jealousy?"

"In the first place, Sire, by giving no motive for jealousy; in other words, by loving no one but the one in question."

"Oh! I expected better than that."

"What did you expect?"

"That you would simply answer that jealous people are pacified by concealing the affection which is entertained for the object of their jealousy."

"Dissimulation is difficult, Sire."

"Yet it is only by means of conquering difficulties that any happiness is attained. So far as I am concerned, I swear I will give the lie to those who are jealous of me, if it is necessary, by pretending to treat you like any other woman."

"A bad as well as an unsafe means," said the young woman, shaking her pretty head.

"You seem to think everything bad, dear Henrietta," said Louis, discontentedly. "You refute everything I propose. Suggest, at least, something else in its stead.

Come, try to think. I trust implicitly to a woman's invention. Do you invent in your turn."

"Well, Sire, I have hit upon something. Will you listen to it?"

"Can you ask me? You speak of a matter of life or death to me, and then ask if I will listen?"

"Well, I judge of it by my own feelings. If my husband intended to put me on the wrong scent with regard to another woman, one thing would reassure me more than anything else."

"What would that be?"

"In the first place, to see that he never took any notice of the woman in question."

"Exactly. That is precisely what I said just now."

"Very well; but in order to be perfectly reassured, I should wish to see him occupy himself with some one else."

"Ah! I understand you," replied Louis, smiling. "But confess, dear Henrietta, if the means is ingenious, it is hardly charitable."

"Why so?"

"In curing the dread of a wound in a jealous person's mind, you inflict one upon his heart. His fear ceases, it is true; but the evil still exists, and that seems to me to be far worse."

"Agreed. But at least he does not detect, he does not suspect, the real enemy; he does no prejudice to love itself; he concentrates all his strength on the side where his strength will do no injury to anything or any one. In a word, Sire, my plan, which I confess I am surprised to find you dispute, is mischievous to jealous people, it is true; but to lovers it is full of advantage. Besides, let me ask, Sire, who — except yourself, perhaps — has ever thought of pitying jealous people? Are they not a

melancholy set of creatures, always equally unhappy, whether with or without a cause? You may remove that cause, but you do not put an end to their sufferings. It is a disease which lies in the imagination; and like all imaginary disorders, it is incurable. By the by, I remember an aphorism upon this subject of poor Dr. Dawley, — a learned and witty man, whom had it not been for my brother, who could not do without him, I should have with me now. He used to say to me: 'Whenever you suffer from two affections, choose that which will give you the least trouble. I will leave you that; for it is certain,' he said, 'that it will be of the greatest use to me in enabling me to get rid of the other.'"

"Well and judiciously remarked, dear Henrietta," replied the king, smiling.

"Oh! we have some clever people in London, Sire."

"And those clever people produce adorable pupils. I will grant this Daley, Darley, Dawley — or whatever you call him — a pension to-morrow for his aphorism; but I entreat you, Henrietta, to begin by choosing the least of your evils. You do not answer, — you smile. I guess that the least of your evils is your stay in France. I will allow you to retain this misfortune; and in order to begin with the cure of the other, I will this very day begin to look out for a subject which shall divert the attention of the jealous members of either sex who persecute us both."

"Hush! this time some one is really coming," said Madame; and she stooped down to gather a periwinkle from the thick grass at her feet. Some one, in fact, was approaching; for suddenly a bevy of young girls ran down from the top of the little hillock, following the cavaliers, — the cause of this irruption being a magnif-

cent hawk-moth, with its upper wings like the plumage of the tawny owl, and the lower wings like rose-leaves. The prey in question had fallen into the net of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, who displayed it with some pride to her less successful rivals. The queen of the chase had seated herself some twenty paces from the bench on which were Louis and Madame Henrietta, and leaned her back against a magnificent oak-tree entwined with ivy, and stuck the butterfly on the long cane she carried in her hand. Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente was very beautiful; and the gentlemen accordingly deserted her companions, and under the pretext of complimenting her upon her success pressed in a circle around her. The king and the princess looked at this scene as spectators of maturer age look on at the games of little children.

"They seem to be amusing themselves there," said the king.

"Greatly, Sire; I have always found that people are amused wherever youth and beauty are to be found."

"What do you think of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, Henrietta?" inquired the king.

"I think that she is rather fair in complexion," replied Madame, fixing in a moment upon the only fault it was possible to find in the almost perfect beauty of the future Madame de Montespan.

"Rather fair, yes; but beautiful, I think, in spite of that."

"Is that your opinion, Sire?"

"Yes, really."

"Well, then, it is mine too."

"And she seems to be much sought after too."

"Oh! that is a matter of course; lovers flutter from one to another. If we had hunted for lovers instead of

butterflies, you can see from those who surround her what successful sport we should have had."

"Tell me, Henrietta, what would be said if the king were to make himself one of those lovers and let his glance fall in that direction? Would some one else be jealous in such a case?"

"Oh, Sire, Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente is a very efficacious remedy," said Madame, with a sigh. "She would cure a jealous man, certainly, but she might possibly make a woman jealous too."

"Henrietta," exclaimed Louis, "you fill my heart with joy! Yes, yes, you are right, — Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente is far too beautiful to serve as a cloak."

"A king's cloak," said Madame Henrietta, smiling, "ought to be beautiful."

"Do you advise me to do it, then?" inquired Louis.

"I! What should I say, Sire, except that to give such advice would be to supply arms against myself? It would be folly or pride to advise you to take for the heroine of an assumed affection a woman more beautiful than the one for whom you pretend to feel real regard."

The king tried to take Madame's hand in his own. His eyes sought hers; and then he murmured a few words full of tenderness, but pronounced in so low a tone that the historian, who ought to hear everything, could not hear them. Then, speaking aloud, he said: "Do you yourself choose for me the one who is to cure our victim of jealousy. To her, then, all my devotion, all my attention, all the time that I can spare from my occupations, shall be devoted. For her, Henrietta, shall be the flower that I may pluck for you, the fond thoughts with which you have inspired me; towards her the glance that I dare not bestow upon you, and which ought to arouse you from your indifference. But be careful in

your selection, lest in trying to think of her, in offering her the rose which I may have plucked, I should find myself conquered by yourself; and lest my looks, my hand, my lips, should not turn immediately towards you, even were the whole world to guess my secret!"

While these words escaped from the king's lips in a stream of wild affection, Madame blushed, breathless, happy, proud, almost intoxicated with delight. She could find nothing to say in reply; her pride and her thirst for homage were satisfied. "I shall fail," she said, raising her beautiful eyes, "but not as you beg me; for, ah, Sire, all this incense which you wish to burn on the altar of another divinity, — I too shall be jealous of it, and want it to be restored to me, and would not wish that a particle of it should be lost in the way. Therefore, Sire, with your royal permission, I will choose one who shall appear to me the least likely to distract your attention, and who will leave my image inviolate in your heart."

"Happily for me," said the king, "your circle of attendants is not badly made up; otherwise I should be alarmed at the threat you hold out. Our precautions have been taken on this point, and around you, as around myself, it would be difficult to meet with a disagreeable-looking face."

While the king was speaking, Madame had risen from her seat and looked around the greensward; and after a careful and silent examination she called the king to her side, and said, "See, Sire, upon the declivity of that little hill, near that clump of gelder-roses, that beautiful girl walking alone behind the others, her head down, her arms hanging by her side, with her eyes fixed upon the flowers which she crushes beneath her feet, like one who is lost in thought."

"Mademoiselle de la Valhère, do you mean?" remarked the king.

"Yes."

"Oh!"

"Will she not suit you, Sire?"

"Why, look how thin the poor child is! she has hardly any flesh upon her bones."

"Nay; am I stout, then?"

"She is so melancholy."

"The greater contrast to myself, who am accused of being too lively."

"She is lame."

"Do you think so?"

"No doubt of it; look, she has allowed every one to pass by her lest her defect should be remarked."

"Well, she will not run so fast as Daphne, and will not be able to escape Apollo."

"Henrietta," said the king, out of temper, "of all your maids of honor, you have really selected for me the one most full of defects."

"Still, she is one of my maids of honor; take note of that!"

"Of course, but what do you mean?"

"I mean that in order to visit this new divinity you will not be able to do so without paying a visit to my apartments, and that as propriety will forbid your conversing with your goddess in private, you will be compelled to see her in my circle, to speak to me while speaking to her. I mean, in fact, that those who may be jealous will be wrong if they suppose you come to my apartments for my sake, since you will come there for Mademoiselle de la Vallière's."

"Who happens to be lame."

"Hardly that."

"Who never opens her lips."

"But who, when she does open them, displays a beautiful set of teeth"

"Who may serve as a model for an osteologist."

"Your favor will ripen her charms."

"Henrietta!"

"At all events, you have allowed me to be the mistress."

"Alas! yes."

"Well, my choice is made; I impose her upon you, and you must submit."

"Oh! I would accept one of the furies, if you were to insist upon it."

"La Vallière is as gentle as a lamb, do not fear that she will ever contradict you when you tell her you love her," said Madame, laughing

"You are not afraid, are you, that I shall say too much to her?"

"It would be for my sake."

"Very well."

"The treaty is agreed to, then?"

"And signed."

"You will continue to show me the friendship of a brother, the attention of a brother, the gallantry of a monarch, will you not?"

"I will preserve for you a heart which can no longer beat except at your command."

"Very well. Do you not see that we have secured the future by this means?"

"I hope so."

"Will your mother cease to regard me as an enemy?"

"Yes."

"Will Maria Theresa leave off speaking in Spanish before Monsieur, who has a horror of conversations held

in foreign languages, because he always thinks that he is being ill-spoken of?"

"Alas! is he wrong in that?" murmured the king, tenderly.

"And lastly," continued the princess, "will people persist in attributing a wrongful affection to the king, when the truth is, we can be nothing to each other, except in sympathy, free from all hidden designs?"

"Yes, yes," said the king, hesitatingly. "But yet other things may still be said."

"What can be said, Sire? Shall we never indeed be left in peace?"

"People will say," continued the king, "that I am wanting in taste; but what is my self-respect in comparison with your tranquillity?"

"In comparison with my honor, Sire, and that of our family, you mean. Besides, believe me, do not be so hastily prejudiced against La Vallière. She is lame, it is true, but she is not deficient in good sense. Moreover, all that the king touches is converted into gold."

"Well, Madame, be assured of one thing, — namely, that I am still grateful to you; you might make me pay dearer for your stay in France."

"Sire, some one approaches."

"Well!"

"One last word."

"Say it!"

"You are prudent and judicious, Sire; but in the present instance you will be obliged to summon to your aid all your prudence and all your judgment."

"Oh!" exclaimed Louis, laughing, "from this very evening I shall begin to act my part, and you shall see whether I am not quite fit to play the tender swain. After luncheon there will be a grand promenade in the

forest, and then there will be supper and the ballet at ten o'clock."

"I know it."

"The ardor of my passion shall blaze this evening more brilliantly than the fireworks, shall shine more steadily than the lamps of our friend Colbert; it shall shine so dazzlingly that the queens and Monsieur will be almost blinded by it."

"Take care, Sire, take care!"

"In Heaven's name, what have I done, then?"

"I shall begin to recall the compliments I paid you just now. You prudent, you wise, did I say? Why, you begin by the most reckless inconsistencies. Can a passion be kindled in this manner, like a torch, in a moment? Can a monarch like you, without any preliminaries, fall at the feet of a girl like La Vallière?"

"Ah! Henrietta, now I understand you. We have not yet begun the campaign, and you are plundering me already."

"No, I am only recalling you to sane ideas. Let your passion be kindled gradually, instead of allowing it to burst forth so suddenly. Jove's thunders and lightnings are heard and seen before the palace is set on fire. Everything has its beginning. If you are so easily excited, no one will believe that you are really captivated, and every one will think you out of your senses, — unless, indeed, the truth itself be not guessed. People are not always so foolish as they seem."

The king was obliged to admit that Madame was an angel for wisdom and a devil for cunning. He bowed, and said: "Agreed, Madame; I will think over my plan of attack. Great military men — my cousin De Condé, for instance — grow pale in meditation upon their strategical plans before they move one of the pawns which

people call armies. I therefore wish to draw up a complete plan of attack, for you know that the tender passion is subdivided in all sorts of ways. Well, then, I shall stop at the village of Little Attentions, at the hamlet of Love Letters, before I follow the road of Visible Affection; the way is clear enough, you know, and this poor Madame de Scudéry would never forgive me for passing through a halting-place without stopping."

"Oh! now that we have returned to our proper senses, shall we say adieu to each other, Sire?"

"Alas, it must be so; for, see! we are interrupted."

"Yes, indeed," said Madame Henrietta, "they are bringing us Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente and her sphinx butterfly with the sound of the horn, after the manner of mighty huntsmen."

"It is perfectly well understood, then, that this evening, during the promenade, I am to make my escape into the forest, and finding La Vallière without you —"

"I will take care to send her away."

"Very well! I will speak to her when she is with her companions, and I will then discharge my first arrow at her."

"Be skilful," said Madame, laughing, "and do not miss the heart."

The princess took leave of the king, and went forward to meet the merry troop, which was advancing with much ceremony and a great many pretended flourishes of hunting-horns, which they imitated with their mouths.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE BALLET OF THE SEASONS.

At the conclusion of the banquet, which had been served at five o'clock, the king entered his cabinet, where his tailors were awaiting him, for the purpose of trying on the celebrated costume representing Spring, which had cost so many efforts of imagination and sober thought to the designers and ornament-workers of the court. As for the ballet itself, every person knew the part he had to take in it, and how to perform that part. The king had resolved to make it a matter of surprise. Hardly, therefore, had he finished his conference and entered his own apartment, when he desired his two masters of the ceremonies, De Villeroy and De Saint-Aignan, to be sent for. Both replied that they only awaited his orders, and that everything was ready to begin, but that it was necessary to make sure of fine weather and a favorable night before those orders could be carried out.

The king opened his window. The golden hues of evening could be seen in the horizon through the vistas of the wood; and the moon, white as snow, was already visible in the heavens Not a ripple on the surface of the green waters; the swans themselves even, reposing with folded wings like ships at anchor, seemed impressed by the warmth of the air, the freshness of the water, and the silence of the beautiful evening. The king, having observed all these things and contemplated the magnificent picture before him, gave the order which Messieurs de Villeroy and de Saint-Aignan awaited; but with the view

of insuring the execution of this order in a royal manner, one last question was necessary, and Louis XIV. put it to the two gentlemen, in four words: "Have you any money?"

"Sire," replied De Saint-Aignan, "we have arranged everything with M. Colbert."

"Ah, very well!"

"Yes, Sire, and M. Colbert said that he would wait upon your Majesty as soon as your Majesty should manifest an intention of carrying out the festivities, of which he has furnished the programme."

"Let him come in, then," said the king; and as if Colbert had been listening at the door for the purpose of following the conversation, he entered as soon as the king had pronounced his name before the two courtiers.

"Ah, very good, M. Colbert!" said his Majesty. "Messieurs, to your posts!" whereupon De Saint-Aignan and De Villeroy took their leave The king seated himself in an easy-chair near the window, saying, "The ballet will take place this evening, M. Colbert."

"In that case, Sire, I shall settle the accounts tomorrow."

"Why so?"

"I promised the tradespeople to pay their bills the day after that on which the ballet should take place."

"Very well, M. Colbert; pay them, since you have promised to do so."

"Certainly, Sire; but I must have money to do that."

"What! have not the four millions which M. Fouquet promised been sent? I had forgotten to ask you about that."

"Sire, they were sent to your Majesty at the hour promised."

"Well?"

"Well, Sire, the colored lamps, the fireworks, the musi

cians, and the cooks have swallowed up four millions in a week"

"Entirely?"

"To the last sou. Every time that your Majesty directed the banks of the grand canal to be illuminated, as much oil was consumed as there was water in the basins."

"Well, well, M. Colbert; the fact is, then, you have no more money."

"I have no more, Sire; but M. Fouquet has," Colbert replied, his face darkening with a sinister expression of pleasure.

"What do you mean?" inquired Louis.

"Sire, we have already made M. Fouquet advance six millions. He has given them with too much readiness not to have others still to give, if they are required, which is the case at the present moment. It is necessary, therefore, that he should comply."

The king frowned. "M. Colbert," said he, accentuating the financier's name, "that is not the way I understood the matter. I do not wish against any one of my servants to make use of means which may oppress him and fetter his services. In a week M. Fouquet has furnished six millions; that is a good sum."

Colbert turned pale. "And yet," he said, "your Majesty did not use this language some time ago, — when the news about Belle-Isle arrived, for instance."

"That is true, M. Colbert."

"Nothing, however, has changed since then; quite the contrary, indeed."

"In my thoughts, Monsieur, everything has changed."

"Does your Majesty, then, no longer believe the attempts?"

"My own affairs concern me alone, Monsieur; and I have already told you that I transact them myself."

"Then I perceive," said Colbert, trembling with rage and fear, "that I have had the misfortune to fall into disgrace with your Majesty."

"Not at all; you are, on the contrary, most agreeable to me."

"Yet, Sire," said the minister, with a certain affected bluntness, so successful when it was a question of flattering Louis's self-esteem, "what use is there in being agreeable to your Majesty, if one can no longer be of any service to you?"

"I reserve your services for a better occasion; and, believe me, they will only be the better appreciated."

"Your Majesty's plan, then, in this affair is—"

"You want money, M. Colbert?"

"Seven hundred thousand livres, Sire."

"You will take them from my private treasure." Colbert bowed. "And," added Louis, "as it seems a difficult matter for you, notwithstanding your economy, to defray with so limited a sum the expenses which I intend to incur, I will sign you an order for three millions."

The king took a pen and signed an order immediately, then handed the paper to Colbert. "Be satisfied," said he; "M. Colbert, the plan I have adopted is one worthy of a king;" and with these words, pronounced with all the majesty which the young prince knew how to assume in such circumstances, he dismissed Colbert in order to give an audience to his tailors.

The order issued by the king was known throughout Fontainebleau; it was already known, too, that the king was trying on his costume, and that the ballet would be danced in the evening. The news circulated with the rapidity of lightning; during its progress it kindled every variety of coquetry, desire, and wild ambition. At the same moment, as if by enchantment, every one who knew

how to hold a needle — every one who could distinguish doublet from hose, as Moliere says — was summoned to the assistance of the beaux and the ladies.

The king had completed his toilet at nine o'clock; he appeared in an open carriage decorated with branches of trees and flowers. The queens had taken their seats upon a magnificent dais, or platform, erected upon the borders of the lake, in a theatre of wonderful elegance of construction. In the space of five hours the carpenters had put together all the different parts connected with the theatre; the upholsterers had laid down the carpets and erected the seats; and as if at the signal of an enchanter's wand, a thousand arms, aiding instead of interfering with one another, had constructed the building on this spot to the sound of music; while at the same time other workmen illuminated the theatre and the shores of the lake with an incalculable number of tapers.

As the heavens, set with stars, were perfectly unclouded, as not even a breath of air could be heard in the woods, — as if Nature herself had yielded complacently to the king's fancies, — the back of the theatre had been left open; so that, behind the foreground of the scenes, could be seen as a background the beautiful sky glittering with stars, the sheet of water on fire with the lights which were reflected in it, and the bluish outline of the grand masses of woods with their rounded tops. When the king made his appearance, the whole theatre was full, and presented to the view one vast group, dazzling with gold and precious stones, in which at the first glance no one single face could be distinguished. By degrees, as the eye became accustomed to so much splendor, the rarest beauties appeared to the view, as in the evening sky the stars appear one by one to him who closes his eyes and then opens them again.

The theatre represented a grove of trees: several fauns, lifting up their cloven feet, were leaping about here and there; a dryad appeared on the scene, and enticed them to pursuit of her; others gathered round her for her defence, and they quarrelled as they danced. Suddenly, to restore peace and order, Spring, accompanied by his whole court, made his appearance. The Elements, the subaltern powers of mythology, together with their attributes, crowded in the footsteps of their gracious sovereign. The Seasons, the allies of Spring, came to his side to form a quadrille, which after many words of more or less flattering import was the beginning of the dance. The music of hautboys, flutes, and viols was descriptive of rural delights.

The king had already entered upon the scene amid thunders of applause He was dressed in a tunic of flowers, which set off his easy and well-formed figure to advantage. His legs, the best shaped at the court, were also displayed to great advantage in flesh-colored silken hose, of silk so fine and so transparent that it seemed almost like flesh itself. The most beautiful pale-lilac satin shoes, with bows of flowers and leaves, confined his small feet. The bust of the figure was in harmonious keeping with the base. Beautiful waving hair; a fresh complexion, enhanced by the brilliancy of beautiful blue eyes, which softly kindled all hearts; a mouth with tempting lips, which deigned to open in smiles, — such was the prince of the period, who had that evening been justly named "The King of all the Loves." There was something in his carriage which resembled the buoyant majesty of an immortal; he did not dance, — he soared. His entrance had produced, therefore, the most brilliant effect. Suddenly the Comte de Saint-Aignan was observed endeavoring to approach either the king or Madame.

The princess — who was clothed in a long dress, diaphanous and light as the finest network tissue from the hands of the skilful Mechlin workers, her knee occasionally revealed beneath the folds of the tunic, and her dainty feet encased in silken shoes — advanced, radiant with beauty, accompanied by her *cortége* of Bacchantes, and had already reached the spot which had been assigned to her in the dance. The applause continued so long that the count had ample leisure to join the king, who was standing still.

"What is the matter, De Saint-Aignan?" said Spring.

"*Mon Dieu!* Sire," replied the courtier, as pale as death; "but your Majesty has not thought of the Fruits."

"Yes; it is suppressed."

"Far from it, Sire; your Majesty having given no directions about it, the musicians have retained it."

"How excessively annoying!" murmured the king. "This figure cannot be performed, since M. de Guiche is absent. It must be suppressed."

"Oh, Sire, a quarter of an hour's music without any dancing will produce an effect so chilling as to ruin the success of the ballet."

"But, Count, then —"

"Oh, Sire, that is not the greatest misfortune; for, after all, the orchestra could still just as well cut it out, if it were necessary; but —"

"But what?"

"Why, M. de Guiche is here."

"Here?" replied the king, frowning, — "here? Are you sure?"

"Yes, Sire; and ready-dressed for the ballet."

The king felt the color rise to his face, and said, "You are probably mistaken."

"So little is that the case, Sire, that if your Majesty

will look to the right, you will see that the count is waiting."

Louis turned hastily towards that side; and in fact, on the right, brilliant in his character of Autumn, De Guiche was waiting until the king should look at him, in order that he might address him. To describe the stupefaction of the king, and that of Monsieur, who was moving about restlessly in his box; to describe also the whisperings and the oscillation of the heads in the theatre, and the strange emotion of Madame at the sight of her partner, — is a task we must leave to abler hands.

The king stood almost gaping with astonishment as he looked at the count, who bowing lowly approached with the profoundest respect. "Sire," he said, "your Majesty's most humble servant comes to perform a service on this occasion, as he has done on the day of battle. Your Majesty, in omitting the dance of the Fruits, would be losing the most beautiful scene in the ballet. I did not wish to be the cause of so great a prejudice to your Majesty's elegance, skill, and graceful address; and I have left my tenants in order to offer my services to my prince."

Every word fell distinctly, in perfect harmony and eloquence, upon Louis XIV.'s ears. Their flattery pleased, as much as De Guiche's courage had astonished him, and he contented himself with replying, "I did not tell you to return, Count."

"Certainly not, Sire; but your Majesty did not tell me to remain."

The king perceived that time was passing away, that if the scene were prolonged it might complicate everything, and that a single cloud upon the picture would irredeemably spoil the whole. Besides, the king's heart suggested some bright ideas; he had just derived fresh

inspiration from the eloquent glances of Madame. Henrietta's look had said to him, "Since they are jealous of you, divide their suspicions, for the man who distrusts two rivals does not distrust either in particular;" so that Madame by this clever diversion decided him. The king smiled upon De Guiche, who did not comprehend a word of Madame's dumb language, but only remarked that she pretended not to look at him; and he attributed the pardon which had been conferred upon him to the princess's kindness of heart.

The king seemed pleased with every one present. Monsieur alone could not understand. The ballet began; it was magnificent. When the music by its bursts of melody carried away these illustrious dancers; when the simple, untutored pantomime of that period, far more naive on account of the very indifferent acting of the august actors, had reached its culminating point of triumph, — the theatre almost fell, with the tumultuous applause.

De Guiche shone like a sun, but like a courtly sun which is contented to fill a subordinate part. Disdainful of a success of which Madame showed no acknowledgment, he thought of nothing but of boldly regaining the marked preference of the princess. She, however, did not bestow a single glance upon him. By degrees all his happiness, all his brilliancy, subsided into grief and anxiety; so that his limbs lost their power, his arms hung heavily by his side, and his head seemed stupefied. The king, who had from this moment become in reality the principal dancer in the quadrille, cast a side glance upon his vanquished rival. De Guiche ceased to sustain even the character of the courtier; without applause, he danced indifferently, and very soon could not dance at all. The triumph of the king and of Madame was assured.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE NYMPHS OF THE PARK OF FONTAINEBLEAU.

The king remained for a moment to enjoy his triumph, which we have said was as complete as it could possibly be. He then turned towards Madame, for the purpose of admiring her also a little. Young persons love with more vivacity, perhaps with greater ardor and deeper passion, than others of a riper age, but all the other feelings are at the same time active in proportion to their youth and vigor; so that vanity being with them almost always the equivalent of love, the latter feeling, according to the laws of equipoise, never attains that degree of perfection which it acquires in men and women from thirty to five-and-thirty years of age. Louis thought of Madame, but only after he had carefully thought of himself, and Madame carefully thought of herself, without perhaps bestowing a single thought upon the king.

The victim, however, amid all this royal love and vanity was De Guiche. Every one could observe the agitation and the prostration of the poor gentleman, — a prostration which was, indeed, the more remarkable since people were not accustomed to see him with his arms hanging listlessly by his side, his head heavy, and his eyes with their bright intelligence gone. It rarely happened that any uneasiness was excited on his account, whenever a question of elegance or taste was under discussion, and De Guiche's defeat was accordingly attributed by the greater number present to his courtier-like

tact and ability. But there were others — keen-sighted observers are always to be met with at court — who remarked his paleness and his listlessness, which he could neither feign nor conceal; and they concluded, with reason, that De Guiche was not acting the part of a flatterer. All these sufferings, successes, and comments were blended, confounded, and lost in the uproar of applause.

When, however, the queens had expressed their satisfaction and the spectators their enthusiasm, when the king had retired to his dressing-room to change his costume, and while Monsieur — dressed as a woman, as he delighted to be — was, in his turn, dancing about, De Guiche, who had now recovered himself, approached Madame, who, seated at the back of the theatre, was waiting for the second part, and had created a solitude for herself in the midst of the crowd, to meditate as it were beforehand upon chorographic effects; and it will be perfectly understood that, absorbed in this deep meditation, she did not see, or rather she pretended not to see, anything that was going on around her. De Guiche, then, observing that she was alone, near a thicket constructed of painted cloth, approached her. Two of her maids of honor, dressed as hamadryads, seeing De Guiche advance, drew back out of respect, whereupon De Guiche proceeded towards the middle of the circle and saluted her royal Highness; but whether she did or did not observe his salutation, her royal Highness did not even turn her head. A cold shiver passed through the unhappy man; he was unprepared for so utter an indifference, for he had neither seen nor been told of anything that had taken place, and consequently could guess nothing. Remarking, therefore, that his obeisance obtained him no acknowledgment, he advanced one step farther, and in a voice which

he tried, though uselessly, to render calm, he said, "I have the honor to present my most humble respects to your royal Highness."

Upon this Madame deigned to turn her eyes languidly towards the count, observing, "Ah! M. de Guiche, is that you? Good-day!" and she turned away again.

The count's patience almost forsook him, as he continued, "Your royal Highness danced just now most enchantingly."

"Do you think so?" replied Madame, with indifference.

"Yes; the character which your royal Highness assumed is in perfect harmony with your own."

Madame again turned round, and looking De Guiche full in the face with a bright and steady gaze, said, "Why so?"

"Oh, there can be no doubt of it!"

"Explain yourself!"

"You represent a divinity, beautiful, disdainful, and inconstant," said he.

"You mean Pomona, Monsieur the Count?"

"I allude to the goddess your royal Highness represents."

Madame remained silent for a moment with her lips compressed, and then observed, "But, Monsieur, you, too, are an excellent dancer."

"Nay, Madame; I am only one of those who are never noticed, or who are soon forgotten if they ever happen to be noticed." And with this remark, accompanied by one of those deep sighs which affect the remotest fibres of one's being, his heart burdened with sorrow and throbbing fast, his head on fire, and his gaze wandering, he bowed breathlessly and withdrew behind the cloth thicket.

The only reply Madame condescended to make was

by slightly raising her shoulders; and since her ladies of honor had, as has been said, discreetly remained apart while the conversation lasted, she recalled them by a look. The ladies were Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente and Mademoiselle de Montalais Both, at this signal from Madame, hastened to approach.

"Did you hear, Mesdemoiselles, what M. le Comte de Guiche said?" the princess inquired.

"No."

"It really is very singular," she continued in a compassionate tone, "how exile has affected poor M. de Guiche's wit;" and then in a louder voice, fearful lest her unhappy victim might lose a syllable, she said, "In the first place he danced badly, and then afterwards his remarks were very silly."

She then rose, humming the air to which she was presently going to dance. De Guiche had overheard everything. The arrow had pierced his heart and wounded him mortally. Then, at the risk of interrupting the progress of the *fête* by his ill-humor, he fled from the scene, tearing his beautiful costume of Autumn in pieces, and scattering, as he went along, the branches of vines, mulberry and almond trees, and all the other artificial attributes of his divinity. A quarter of an hour afterwards he had returned to the theatre; but it will be readily believed that it was only a powerful effort of reason over his distraction that had enabled him to recover; or perhaps — for the heart is so constituted — he found it impossible even to remain much longer separated from the presence of one who had broken his heart.

Madame was finishing her figure. She saw, but did not look at him; and he, irritated and furious, turned his back upon her as she passed him, escorted by her nymphs and followed by a hundred flatterers. During

this time, at the other end of the theatre, near the lake, a young woman was seated with her eyes fixed upon one of the windows of the theatre, from which were issuing streams of light, — the window in question being that of the royal box. As De Guiche left the theatre for the purpose of getting into the fresh air he so much needed, he passed close to this lady and saluted her. When she on her part perceived the young man, she rose like a woman surprised in the midst of ideas she was desirous of concealing even from herself. De Guiche stopped as he recognized her, and said hurriedly, "Good-evening, Mademoiselle de la Vallière; I am indeed fortunate in meeting you."

"I also, Monsieur the Count, am glad of this accidental meeting," said the young girl, as she was about to withdraw

"Pray do not leave me," said De Guiche, stretching out his hand towards her, "for you would thus be contradicting the kind words you have just pronounced. Remain, I implore you! The evening is most lovely; you wish to escape from this tumult, and prefer your own society. Well, I can understand it; all women who are possessed of any feeling do, and you never find them dull or lonely when removed from the giddy vortex of these exciting amusements. Oh, Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle!"

"What is the matter, Monsieur the Count?" inquired La Vallière, in some alarm; "you seem agitated."

"I? — oh, no!"

"Then will you allow me, M. de Guiche, to return you the thanks I had proposed to offer you on the very first opportunity. It is to your recommendation, I am aware, that I owe my admission among the number of Madame's maids of honor."

"Indeed! Ah! I remember now, and I congratulate myself, Mademoiselle. Do you love any one?"

"I!" exclaimed La Vallière.

"Forgive me! I hardly know what I am saying; a thousand times forgive me! Madame was right, quite right, — this brutal exile has completely turned my brain."

"And yet it seemed to me that the king received you with kindness, Monsieur the Count."

"Do you think so? Received me with kindness — perhaps so — yes —"

"There cannot be a doubt that he received you kindly, for in fact you have returned without his permission."

"Quite true, and I believe you are right, Mademoiselle. But have you not seen M de Bragelonne here?"

La Vallière started at that name. "Why do you ask?" she inquired.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* have I offended you again?" said De Guiche. "In that case I am indeed unhappy, and greatly to be pitied"

"Yes, very unhappy, and very much to be pitied, M. de Guiche; for you seem to be suffering terribly."

"Oh, Mademoiselle, why have I not a devoted sister or a true friend?"

"You have friends, M. de Guiche; and M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne, of whom you spoke just now, is, I believe, one of them."

"Yes, yes, you are right; he is one of my best friends. Adieu, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, adieu;" and he fled like one possessed along the shore of the lake. His dark shadow glided, lengthening as it disappeared, among the blazing pyramids of lamps and the glittering undulations of the water. La Vallière looked after him compas-

sionately for some time, saying, "Yes, yes; he, too, is suffering, and I begin to understand why."

La Vallière had hardly finished when her companions, Mademoiselle de Montalais and Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, ran forward. They were released from their attendance, and had changed their costumes of nymphs. Delighted with the beautiful night and the success of the evening, they returned to look after their companion.

"What! already here?" they said to her. "We thought we should be the first at the rendezvous."

"I have been here this quarter of an hour," replied La Vallière.

"Did not the dancing amuse you?"

"No."

"But surely, the whole spectacle?"

"No more than the dancing. So far as a spectacle is concerned, I much prefer that which these dark woods present, in whose depths can be seen, now in one direction and again in another, a light passing by, — as though it were an eye bright red in color, sometimes open, at others closed."

"La Vallière is quite a poet," said Tonnay-Charente.

"In other words," said Montalais, "she is insupportable. Whenever there is a question of laughing a little or of amusing ourselves with anything, La Vallière begins to cry; whenever we girls have reason to cry, because perhaps we have mislaid our dresses, or because our vanity has been wounded, or our costume fails to produce any effect, La Vallière laughs."

"Oh! for my part, that is not my character," said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente. "I am a woman, and there are few like me. Whoever loves me, flatters me; whoever flatters me, pleases me by his flattery; and whoever pleases me —"

"Well," said Montalais, "you do not finish."

"It is too difficult," replied Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, laughing loudly; "do you, who are so clever, finish for me."

"And you, Louise?" said Montalais, — "does any one please you?"

"That is a matter which concerns no one but myself," replied the young girl, rising from the mossy bank on which she had been reclining during the whole time the ballet had lasted. "Now, Mesdemoiselles, we have agreed to amuse ourselves to-night without any one to overlook us and without any escort. We are three in number, we like one another, and the night is lovely. Look yonder! do you not see the moon slowly rising in the heavens, silvering the topmost branches of the chestnuts and the oaks? Oh, beautiful walk! dear liberty! the beautiful soft turf of the woods, the happiness which your friendship confers upon me! Let us walk arm-in-arm towards those large trees. Out yonder all are at this moment seated at table and fully occupied, or preparing to adorn themselves for a set and formal promenade; horses are being saddled or harnessed to the carriages, — the queen's mules or Madame's four white ponies. As for ourselves, let us quickly reach some retired spot where no eye can see us and no step follow ours. Do you not remember, Montalais, the woods of Chaverny and of Chambord, the numberless poplars of Blois, where we exchanged many of our mutual hopes?"

"And many confidences also?"

"Yes."

"Well," said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, "I also think a good deal, but I take care — "

"To say nothing," said Montalais; "so that when

Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente thinks, Athenaïs is the only one who knows it."

"Hush!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de la Vallière; "I hear steps approaching from this side."

"Quick, quick, then, among the high reed-grass!" said Montalais. "Stoop, Athenais; you are so tall!"

Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente stooped as she was told; and almost at the same moment they saw two gentlemen approaching, their heads bent down, walking arm-in-arm on the fine gravel walk running parallel with the bank. The young girls had indeed made themselves small, for nothing was to be seen of them.

"It is M de Guiche," whispered Montalais in Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente's ear.

"It is M. de Bragelonne," whispered the latter in La Vallière's ear.

The two young men approached still closer, conversing in animated voices. "She was here just now," said the count. "If I had only seen her, I should have declared it to be an apparition; but I spoke to her."

"You are positive, then?"

"Yes; but perhaps, too, I frightened her."

"In what way?"

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* I was still half mad at you know what; so that she could hardly have understood what I was saying, and must have become alarmed"

"Oh," said Bragelonne, "do not make yourself uneasy, my friend! She is all kindness, and will excuse you; she is clear-sighted, and will understand."

"Yes; but if she should have understood, and understood too well, she may talk."

"You do not know Louise, Count," said Raoul. "Louise possesses every virtue, and has not a single

fault." The two young men passed on; and as they proceeded their voices were soon lost in the distance.

"How is it, La Vallière," said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, "that M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne spoke of you as Louise?"

"We were brought up together," replied Mademoiselle de la Vallière; "we were children when we first knew each other."

"And then, M. de Bragelonne is your *fiancé;* every one knows that."

"Oh, no! I did not know it. Is that so, Mademoiselle?"

"That is to say," replied Louise, blushing, "M. de Bragelonne has honored me by asking my hand in marriage; but —"

"Well?"

"It seems the king will not consent to the marriage."

"Eh? Why the king? and what has the king to do with it?" exclaimed Aure, sharply. "Good gracious! has the king the right to interfere in matters of that kind? Politics are politics, as M. de Mazarin used to say; but love is love. If, therefore, you love M. de Bragelonne and he loves you, marry him; I give my consent."

Athenais began to laugh.

"Oh! I speak seriously," replied Montalais, "and my opinion in this case is quite as good as the king's, I suppose; is it not, Louise?"

"Come," said La Vallière, "these gentlemen have passed; let us profit by our being alone to cross the open ground and so take refuge in the woods."

"So much the better," said Athenais; "because I see the torches setting out from the château and the theatre, which seem as if they were preceding some persons of distinction."

"Let us run, then," said all three; and gracefully lifting up the long folds of their silk dresses, they ran lightly across the open space between the lake and the thickest covert of the park. Montalais, agile as a deer, and Athenais, eager as a young wolf, bounded through the dry grass; and now and then some bold Actæon might by the aid of the faint light have perceived their chaste and well-formed limbs somewhat displayed beneath the heavy folds of their satin petticoats. La Vallière, more refined and more bashful, allowed her dress to flow around her; retarded also by her lameness, it was not long before she called out to her companions to halt, and, left behind, she obliged them both to wait for her. At this moment a man concealed in a dry ditch full of young willow saplings scrambled quickly up its shelving side, and ran off in the direction of the château.

The three young girls, for their part, reached the outskirts of the park, every path of which they well knew. The ditches were bordered by high hedges full of flowers, which on that side protected the foot passengers from being intruded upon by the horses and carriages. In fact, the sound of Madame's and of the queen's carriages could be heard rolling in the distance upon the hard, dry ground of the roads. Many cavaliers followed, with the sound so well imitated by the rhythmic line of Virgil. Distant music was heard in response; and when the harmony died away, the nightingale, with his song full of pride, poured forth his melodious chants and his most complicated, learned, and sweet compositions to those who he perceived had met beneath the thick shade of the woods. Near the songster, in the dark background of the great trees, could be seen the glistening eyes of an owl attracted by the harmony. In this way the *fête* for the whole court was a *fête* also for the

mysterious inhabitants of the forest; for certainly the deer from the brake, the pheasant on the branch, the fox in its hole, were all listening. One could realize the life led by all this nocturnal and invisible population from the restless movements which suddenly took place among the leaves. Then our sylvan nymphs would utter a slight cry; but reassured immediately afterwards, they would laugh and resume their walk.

In this manner they reached the royal oak, — the venerable relic of an oak which in its youth had listened to the sighs of Henry II. for the beautiful Diana of Poitiers, and later still to those of Henry IV. for the lovely Gabrielle d'Estrées. Beneath this oak the gardeners had piled up the moss and turf in such a manner that never had a seat more luxurious offered repose to the wearied limbs of any monarch. The trunk of the tree, somewhat rough to recline against, was sufficiently large to accommodate the three young girls, whose voices were lost among the branches, which stretched downwards towards the trunk.

CHAPTER XLV.

WHAT WAS SAID UNDER THE ROYAL OAK.

THE softness of the air, the stillness of the foliage, tacitly imposed upon these young girls the need of changing immediately their trifling conversation for one of a more serious character. She, indeed, whose disposition was the most lively, — namely, Montalais, — was the first to yield to its influence; and she began by heaving a deep sigh, and saying, "What happiness to feel ourselves here alone and at liberty, with every right to be frank, especially towards each other!"

"Yes," said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente; "for the court, however brilliant it may be, has always some falsehood concealed beneath the folds of its velvet robes or beneath the blaze of its diamonds."

"I," replied La Vallière, — "I never tell a falsehood; when I cannot speak the truth, I remain silent."

"You will not remain long in favor, my dear," said Montalais. "It is not here as it was at Blois, where we told the Dowager Madame all our little annoyances and all our longings. There were certain days when Madame remembered that she herself had been young, and on those days whoever talked with her found in her a sincere friend. She related to us her flirtations with Monsieur, and we told her of the flirtations she had had with others, or at least the rumors of them which had been spread abroad. Poor woman, so simple-minded! she laughed at them, as we did. Where is she now?"

"Ah, Montalais, laughter-loving Montalais!" cried La Vallière; "you see that you are sighing again. The woods inspire you, and you are almost reasonable this evening."

"Mesdemoiselles," said Athenaïs, "you ought not to regret the court at Blois so much, unless you do not feel happy with us. A court is a place where men and women resort to talk of matters which mothers, guardians, and especially confessors so severely denounce. At court they talk of such things by the indulgence of the king and the queens; is not that pleasant?"

"Oh, Athenaïs!" said Louise, blushing.

"Athenaïs is frank to-night," said Montalais; "let us avail ourselves of it."

"Yes, let us take advantage of it; for this evening I could divulge the dearest secrets of my heart."

"Ah, if M. de Montespan were here!" said Montalais.

"Do you think that I care for M. de Montespan?" murmured the beautiful young girl.

"He is handsome, I believe?"

"Yes; and that is no small advantage in my eyes."

"There now, you see—"

"I will go further, and say that, of all the men whom one sees here, he is the handsomest and the most—"

"What was that?" said La Vallière, starting suddenly from the mossy bank.

"A deer which is hurrying through the branches."

"I am only afraid of men," said Athenaïs.

"When they do not resemble M. de Montespan."

"A truce to this raillery! M. de Montespan is attentive to me, but that does not commit me in any way. Is not M. de Guiche here,—he who is so devoted to Madame?"

"Poor fellow!" said La Vallière.

"Why poor? Madame is sufficiently beautiful, and of sufficiently high rank, I suppose?"

La Vallière shook her head sorrowfully, saying, "When one loves, it is neither beauty nor rank; my dear friends, when one loves, it should be the heart, or the eyes only, of him or of her who is loved."

Montalais began to laugh loudly. "Heart, eyes!" she said; "oh, sugar-plums!"

"I speak for myself," replied La Vallière.

"Noble sentiments," said Athenais, with an air of protection, but with indifference.

"Are they not your own, Mademoiselle?" said Louise.

"Perfectly so; but, to continue, how can one pity a man who bestows his attentions upon such a woman as Madame? If any disproportion exists, it is on the count's side."

"Oh, no, no!" returned La Vallière; "it is on Madame's side."

"Explain yourself."

"I will. Madame has not even a wish to know what love is. She diverts herself with the feeling, as children do with fireworks, of which a spark might set a palace on fire. It makes a display, and that is all she cares about. Besides, pleasure and love form the tissue of which she wishes her life to be woven. M. de Guiche will love this illustrious lady, but she will never love him."

Athenais laughed disdainfully. "Do people really love?" she said. "Where are the noble sentiments which you just now uttered? Does not a woman's virtue consist in the courageous refusal of every intrigue which might compromise her? A properly regulated woman, endowed with a generous heart, ought to look at men, make herself loved, adored even, by them, and say, at the very utmost, once in her life, 'I begin to think that I ought not to have been what I am; I should have detested this one less than others.'"

"Therefore," exclaimed La Vallière, clasping her hands, "that is what M. de Montespan has to expect."

"Certainly, — he as well as every one else. What! have I not said that I admit he possesses a certain superiority, and would not that be enough? My dear, a woman is a queen during the whole period in which Nature permits her to enjoy sovereign power, — from fifteen to thirty-five years of age. After that, we are free to have a heart, when we have only that left."

"Oh, oh!" murmured La Vallière.

"Excellent!" cried Montalais, "a wife and mistress combined in one! Athenais, you will make your way in the world."

"Do you not approve of what I say?"

"Completely," replied her laughing companion.

"You are not serious, Montalais?" said Louise.

"Yes, yes; I approve everything Athenais has just said; only — "

"Only what?"

"Well, I cannot carry it out. I have the firmest principles; I form resolutions beside which the laws of the Stadtholder and of the King of Spain are child's play; but when the moment arrives to put them into execution, nothing comes of them."

"Your courage fails," said Athenaïs, scornfully.

"Miserably."

"Unfortunate nature!" returned Athenais. "But at least you make a choice."

"Why, no, really. It pleases fate to disappoint me in everything: I dream of emperors, and I find only — "

"Aure, Aure!" exclaimed La Vallière, "for pity's sake, do not, for the pleasure of saying something witty, sacrifice those who love you with such devoted affection."

"Oh, I do not trouble myself much about that! Those

who love me are sufficiently happy that I do not dismiss them altogether, my dear. So much the worse for myself if I have a weakness for any one; but so much the worse for others if I revenge myself upon them for it, — and upon my word so I do."

"You are right," said Athenais, "and perhaps you, too, will reach the same goal; in other words, Mesdemoiselles, that is termed being a coquette. Men, who are very silly in most things, are particularly so in confounding, under the term coquetry, a woman's pride and her varying moods. I, for instance, am proud, — that is to say, impregnable; I treat my admirers harshly, but without any pretension to retain them. Men call me a coquette, because they are vain enough to think that I care for them. Other women — Montalais, for instance — have allowed themselves to be influenced by flattery, they would be lost were it not for that most fortunate principle of instinct which urges them to change suddenly, and punish the man whose devotion they so recently accepted."

"A very learned dissertation," said Montalais, in the tone of thorough enjoyment.

"It is odious!" murmured Louise.

"Thanks to this sort of coquetry, — for indeed that is genuine coquetry," continued Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, — "the lover who a little while since was puffed up with pride, a minute later is suffering at every pore of his vanity and self-esteem. He was already beginning to assume the airs of a conqueror, but now he recedes; he was about to assume an air of protection towards us, but he is obliged to prostrate himself anew. The result of all which is that instead of having a husband who is jealous and troublesome and too familiar, we have a lover always trembling in our presence, always longing, and always submissive; and for this simple reason, — that

he finds the same woman never the same. Be convinced, Mesdemoiselles, therefore, of the advantages of coquetry. Possessing that, one reigns a queen among women in cases where Providence has withheld that precious faculty of holding one's heart and mind in check."

"Oh, how clever you are," said Montalais, "and how well you understand the duty women owe themselves!"

"I am only settling a case of individual happiness," said Athenais, modestly, "and defending myself, like all weak, loving dispositions, against the oppression of the stronger."

"La Vallière does not say a word."

"Does she not approve of what we are saying?"

"Nay; only I do not understand it," said Louise. "You talk like those who would not be called upon to live in this world of ours."

"And very pretty your world is," said Montalais.

"A world," returned Athenais, "in which men worship a woman to make her fall in her bewilderment, and insult her when she has fallen."

"Who spoke to you of falling?" said Louise.

"Yours is a new theory, then, my dear. Will you tell us how you intend to resist yielding to temptation, if you allow yourself to be hurried away by love?"

"Oh!" exclaimed the young girl, raising towards the dark heavens her beautiful eyes filled with tears, "if you did but know what a heart was, I would explain, and would convince you! A loving heart is stronger than all your coquetry, and more powerful than all your pride. A woman is never truly loved, I believe, and God is my witness; a man never loves with idolatry, except he feel himself loved in return. Let old men, whom we read of in comedies, fancy themselves adored by coquettes. A young man is conscious of it, and does not delude himself: if he has a fancy or a strong desire or an absorb-

ing passion for a coquette, — you see I give a free field and a broad one, — in a word, a coquette may drive him out of his senses, but will never make him fall in love. Love, such as I conceive it to be, is an incessant, complete, and perfect sacrifice, but it is not the sacrifice of one only of the two persons who are united. It is the perfect abnegation of two souls who are desirous of blending into one. If I ever love, I shall implore my lover to leave me free and pure. I will tell him — what he will understand — that my heart is torn by my refusal, and he in his love for me, aware of the magnitude of my sacrifice, — he in his turn, I say, will show his devotion for me, will respect me, and will not seek my ruin, or insult me when I shall have fallen, as you said just now, when uttering your blasphemies against love such as I understand it. That is my idea of love. And now you will tell me, perhaps, that my lover will despise me. I defy him to do so, unless he be the vilest of men; and my heart assures me that it is not such a man I should choose. A look from me will repay him for the sacrifices he makes, or it will inspire him with virtues which he would never think he possessed."

"But, Louise," exclaimed Montalais, "you tell us this, and do not carry it into practice."

"What do you mean?"

"You are adored by Raoul de Bragelonne, who worships you on both his knees. The poor fellow is made the victim of your virtue, just as he would be — nay, more than he would be, even — of my coquetry or of Athenaïs's pride."

"This is simply a different shade of coquetry," said Athenaïs; "and Mademoiselle, I perceive, is a coquette without knowing it."

"Oh!" said La Vallière.

"Yes, you may call it instinct, if you please, keenest sensibility, exquisite refinement of feeling, perpetual display of outbursts of passion which end in nothing. Oh, it is very artful too, and very effective! I should even, now that I reflect upon it, have preferred this system of tactics to my own pride, for waging war with men, because it offers the advantage sometimes of thoroughly convincing them; but at the present moment, without utterly condemning myself, I declare it to be superior to the simple coquetry of Montalais;" and the two young girls began to laugh.

La Vallière alone preserved silence, and quietly shook her head. Then, a moment after, she added, "If you were to tell me in the presence of a man but a fourth part of what you have just said, or even if I were assured that you think it, I should die of shame and grief upon this spot."

"Very well, die, poor tender little darling!" replied Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente; "for if there are no men here, there are at least two women, your own friends, who declare you to be attainted and convicted of being a coquette from instinct, a born coquette, — in other words, the most dangerous kind of coquette which exists in the world."

"Oh, Mesdemoiselles," replied La Vallière, blushing, and almost ready to weep. Her two companions again burst out laughing

"Very well! I shall ask Bragelonne for information."

"Bragelonne?" said Athenais.

"Yes! that great fellow who is as courageous as Cæsar and as clever and witty as M. Fouquet; that poor fellow who for twelve years has known you, loved you, and yet — one can hardly believe it — has never even kissed the tips of your fingers."

"Explain to us this cruelty, — you who are all heart," said Athenais to La Vallière.

"I will explain it by a single word, — virtue. You will perhaps deny the existence of virtue?"

"Come, Louise, tell us the truth," said Aure, taking her by the hand.

"But what do you wish me to tell you!" cried La Vallière.

"Whatever you like, but it will be useless for you to say anything, for I persist in my opinion of you, — a coquette from instinct, a born coquette, in other words, as I have already said, and I say it again, the most dangerous of all coquettes!"

"Oh, no, no! for pity's sake, do not believe that!"

"What! twelve years of extreme severity?"

"Why, twelve years ago I was only five years old! The freedom of the child cannot, surely, be added to the young girl's account."

"Well, you are now seventeen, — three years instead of twelve. During those three years you have remained constantly and unchangeably cruel. Against you are arrayed the silent shades of Blois, the meetings when you diligently conned the stars together, the evening wanderings beneath the plane-trees, his impassioned twenty years speaking to your fourteen years, the fire of his glances addressed to yourself."

"Yes, yes; but so it is!"

"Nonsense! impossible!"

"But, *mon Dieu!* why impossible?"

"Tell us something credible, my dear, and we will believe you."

"Yet if you were to suppose one thing —"

"What is that?"

"Out with it, or we shall suppose much more than you like!"

"Suppose, then, that I thought I was in love, and that I am not."

"What! not in love?"

"If I have acted in a different manner from that of others when they are in love, it is because I do not love, and because my hour has not yet come."

"Louise, Louise," said Montalais, "take care, or I shall remind you of the remark you made just now! Raoul is not here; do not overwhelm him while he is absent. Be charitable; and if on closer inspection you think you do not love him, tell him so, poor fellow!" and she began to laugh.

"Louise pitied M. de Guiche just now," said Athenais; "would it be possible to detect the explanation of the indifference for the one in this compassion for the other?"

"Say what you please, Mesdemoiselles," said La Vallière, sadly; "upbraid me as you like, since you do not understand me."

"Oh, oh!" replied Montalais; "temper, sorrow, and tears! We are laughing, Louise, and are not, I assure you, quite the monsters you suppose. Look at the proud Athenais, as she is called: she does not love M. de Montespan, it is true; but she would be in despair if M. de Montespan were not to love her. Look at me: I laugh at M. Malicorne, but the poor fellow whom I laugh at knows very well when he may be permitted to press his lips upon my hand. And yet the eldest of us is not twenty yet. What a future for us!"

"Silly, silly girls!" murmured Louise.

"You are quite right," said Montalais; "and you alone have spoken words of wisdom."

"Certainly."

"I do not dispute it," replied Athenais. "And so you positively do not love poor M. de Bragelonne?"

"Perhaps she does," said Montalais; "she is not yet quite sure of it. But in any case listen, Athenaïs: if M. de Bragelonne becomes free, I will give you a little friendly advice."

"What is that?"

"To look at him well before you decide in favor of M. de Montespan."

"Oh! in that way of considering the subject, my dear, M. de Bragelonne is not the only person whom one could look at with pleasure. M. de Guiche, for instance, has his value also."

"He did not distinguish himself this evening," said Montalais, "and I know from very good authority that Madame thought him unbearable."

"But M. de Saint-Aignan produced a most brilliant effect, and I am sure that more than one person who saw him dance this evening will not soon forget him. Do you not think so, La Vallière?"

"Why do you ask me? I did not see him, nor do I know him."

"What! you did not see M. de Saint-Aignan, you do not know him?"

"No."

"Come, come! do not affect a virtue more extravagantly excessive than our boldness! You have eyes, I suppose?"

"Excellent."

"Then you must have seen all those who danced this evening."

"Yes, nearly all."

"That is a very impertinent 'nearly all' for some."

"You must take it for what it is worth."

"Very well; now, among all those gentlemen whom you 'nearly all' saw, which do you prefer?"

"Yes," said Montalais; "is it M. de Saint-Aignan, or M. de Guiche, or M. —"

"I prefer no one; I thought them all about the same."

"Do you mean, then, that among all that brilliant assembly — the first court in the world — no one pleased you?"

"I do not say that."

"Tell us, then, who your ideal is."

"It is not an ideal being."

"He exists, then?"

"In very truth, Mesdemoiselles," exclaimed La Vallière, aroused and excited, "I cannot understand you at all! What! you who have a heart as I have, eyes as I have, and yet you speak of M. de Guiche and of M. de Saint-Aignan when the king was there!"

These words, uttered so precipitately and in an agitated, fervid voice, made her two companions between whom she was seated exclaim together, in a manner which terrified her, "The king!"

La Vallière buried her face in her hands. "Yes," she murmured, "the king! the king! Have you ever seen any one to be compared to the king?"

"You were right just now in saying you had excellent eyes, Mademoiselle; for you see a great distance, — too far, indeed. Alas! the king is not one upon whom our poor eyes have a right to be fixed."

"That is too true!" cried La Vallière. "It is not the privilege of all eyes to gaze upon the sun; but I will look upon him, even were I to be blinded in doing so."

At this moment, and as though caused by the words which had just escaped La Vallière's lips, a rustling of leaves and of that which sounded like some silken material was heard behind the adjoining bush. The young girls

hastily rose, almost terrified out of their senses. They distinctly saw the leaves move, but could not tell what it was that stirred them.

"It is a wolf or a wild boar!" cried Montalais; "fly! Mesdemoiselles, fly!"

The three girls, a prey to unspeakable terror, fled by the first path which presented itself, and did not stop until they had reached the verge of the wood. There, breathless, leaning against one another, feeling one another's hearts throb wildly, they endeavored to collect their senses, but could only succeed in doing so after the lapse of some minutes. Perceiving at last the lights from the windows of the château, they decided to walk towards them. La Vallière was exhausted with fatigue, and Aure and Athenais were obliged to support her.

"Oh, we have escaped well!" said Montalais.

"Mesdemoiselles," said La Vallière, "I am greatly afraid that it was something worse than a wolf For my part, and I speak as I think, I should have preferred to run the risk of being devoured alive by some wild animal than to be listened to and overheard. Fool, fool, that I am! How could I have thought, how could I have said such things!" and saying this, her head bowed like a reed; she felt her limbs fail, and, all her strength abandoning her, she glided almost inanimate from the arms of her companions, and sank down upon the grass.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE KING'S UNEASINESS.

Let us leave poor La Vallière, half fainting in the arms of her two companions, and return to the neighborhood of the royal oak. The three young girls had hardly run twenty paces, when the sound which had so much alarmed them was renewed among the branches. A man's figure might indistinctly be perceived, and putting the branches of the bushes aside he appeared upon the verge of the wood, and perceiving that the place was empty burst out into a peal of laughter. It is useless to say that the form in question was that of a young and handsome man, who made a sign to another, who thereupon made his appearance.

"Well, Sire," said the second figure, advancing timidly, "has your Majesty put our young sentimentalists to flight?"

"It seems so," said the king, "and you can show yourself without fear, Saint-Aignan."

"But, Sire, take care! you will be recognized."

"But I tell you they have gone."

"This is a most fortunate meeting, Sire; and if I dared offer an opinion to your Majesty, we ought to follow them."

"They are far away by this time."

"Bah! they would easily allow themselves to be overtaken, especially if they knew who were following them."

"What do you mean by that, Monsieur coxcomb?"

"Why, one of them seems to have taken a fancy to me, and another compared you to the sun."

"The greater reason why we should not show ourselves, Saint-Aignan. The sun does not show himself in the night-time."

"Upon my word, Sire, your Majesty seems to have very little curiosity. In your place, I should like to know who are the two nymphs, the two dryads, the two hamadryads, who have so good an opinion of us."

"Oh, I shall know them again very well, I assure you, without running after them."

"By what means?"

"By their voices, of course. They belong to the court, and the one who spoke of me had a very sweet voice."

"Ah! your Majesty permits yourself to be influenced by flattery."

"No one will ever say it is a means you make use of."

"Forgive my stupidity, Sire!"

"Come; let us go and look where I told you."

"Is the passion, then, which your Majesty confided to me already forgotten?"

"Oh, no, indeed! How is it possible to forget such beautiful eyes as those of Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"

"Yet the other had so sweet a voice."

"Which one?"

"She who has fallen in love with the sun."

"M. de Saint-Aignan!"

"Forgive me, Sire."

"Well, I am not sorry you should believe me to be an admirer of sweet voices as well as of beautiful eyes. I know you to be a terrible talker, and to-morrow I shall have to pay for the confidence I have shown you."

"What do you mean, Sire?"

"I mean that to-morrow every one will know that I

have designs upon this little La Vallière; but be careful, Saint-Aignan! I have confided my secret to no one but you; and if any one should speak to me about it, I shall know who has betrayed my secret."

"You are angry, Sire!"

"No; but you understand that I do not wish to compromise the poor girl."

"Do not be afraid, Sire."

"You promise me, then?"

"Sire, I give you my word of honor."

"Excellent," thought the king, laughing to himself; "now every one will know to-morrow that I have been running about after La Vallière to-night." Then, endeavoring to see where he was, he said, "Why, we have lost ourselves."

"Not quite so bad as that."

"Where does that gate lead?"

"To Rond-Point, Sire."

"Where we were going when we heard the sound of women's voices?"

"Yes, Sire, and the termination of a conversation in which I had the honor of hearing my own name pronounced by the side of your Majesty's."

"You return to that subject very frequently, Saint-Aignan."

"Your Majesty will forgive me, but I am delighted to know that a woman exists whose thoughts are occupied about me without my knowledge and without my having done anything to deserve it. Your Majesty cannot comprehend this satisfaction, for your rank and merit attract attention and compel regard."

"No, no, Saint-Aignan, believe me or not, as you like," said the king, leaning familiarly upon De Saint-Aignan's arm, and taking the path which he thought ought to lead

him to the château; "but this candid confession, this perfectly disinterested preference of a woman who will perhaps never attract my attention, — in one word, the mystery of this adventure excites me; and the truth is that if I were not so taken up with La Vallière — "

"Do not let that interfere with your Majesty's intentions; you have time enough before you."

"What do you mean?"

"La Vallière is said to be very strict in her ideas."

"You excite my curiosity, De Saint-Aignan, and I am anxious to find her again. Come, let us walk on."

The king spoke untruly, — for nothing, on the contrary, troubled him less; but he had a part to play, and so he walked on hurriedly.

De Saint-Aignan followed him at a short distance. Suddenly the king stopped; the courtier followed his example. "Saint-Aignan," he said, "do you not hear some one moaning? Listen!"

"Yes; and crying, too, it seems."

"It is in this direction," said the king, pointing.

"It sounds like the tears and sobs of a woman," said M. de Saint-Aignan.

"Let us run!" and the king and the favorite, following a by-path, ran across the grass. As they gradually approached, the cries were more distinctly heard.

"Help! help!" exclaimed two voices. The young men redoubled their speed; and as they approached nearer, the sobs they had heard were changed into cries. "Help! help!" was again repeated; at the sound of which the king and his companion increased the rapidity of their pace. Suddenly, at the other side of a ditch, under the drooping branches of a willow, they perceived a woman on her knees, holding another in her arms, who seemed to have fainted. A few paces from them, a third, standing in the

middle of the path, was calling for assistance. Perceiving two gentlemen, whose rank she could not tell, her cries for assistance were redoubled. The king, who was in advance of his companion, leaped across the ditch, and reached the group at the very moment when from the end of the path which led to the château a dozen persons were approaching, who had been drawn to the spot by the same cries which had attracted the king and M. de Saint-Aignan.

"What is the matter, Mesdemoiselles?" inquired Louis.

"The king!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Montalais, in her astonishment failing to support La Vallière's head; so that the latter fell full length upon the ground.

"Yes, it is the king; but that is no reason why you should abandon your companion. Who is she?"

"It is Mademoiselle de la Vallière, Sire."

"Mademoiselle de la Vallière!"

"Yes, Sire; she has just fainted."

"Poor child!" said the king. "Quick, quick! fetch a surgeon!"

But however great the anxiety with which the king had pronounced these words, he had not so carefully watched over himself that they did not appear, as well as the gesture which accompanied them, somewhat cold to M. de Saint-Aignan, to whom the king had confided the great love with which she had inspired him.

"Saint-Aignan," continued the king, "watch over Mademoiselle de la Vallière, I beg. Send for a surgeon. I will hasten forward and inform Madame of the accident which has befallen one of her maids of honor;" and in fact, while M. de Saint-Aignan was busily engaged in making preparations for carrying Mademoiselle de la Vallière to the château, the king hurried forward, happy to have an opportunity of approaching Madame, and of

speaking to her under some plausible pretext. Fortunately, a carriage was passing. The coachman was told to stop; and the persons who were inside, having been informed of the accident, eagerly gave up their seats to Mademoiselle de la Vallière. The current of fresh air produced by the rapid motion of the carriage soon recalled the invalid to her senses. Having reached the château, she was able, though very weak, to alight from the carriage and, with the assistance of Athenais and Montalais, to reach the inner apartments. They made her sit down in a room adjoining the drawing-rooms on the ground floor. After a while, as the accident had not produced much effect upon the promenaders, the promenade was resumed. During this time the king had found Madame beneath a tree, and had seated himself by her side; and his foot gently sought that of the princess beneath her chair.

"Take care, Sire!" said Henrietta to him, in a low tone; "you do not show yourself as indifferent as you should be."

"Alas!" replied Louis XIV., in the same tone, "I much fear that we have entered into an agreement above our strength to keep." He then added aloud, "You have heard of the accident, I suppose?"

"What accident?"

"Oh! in seeing you I forgot that I had come expressly to tell you of it. I am, however, painfully affected by it. One of your maids of honor, poor Mademoiselle de la Vallière, has just fainted."

"Indeed! poor girl!" said the princess, quietly; "what was the cause of it?" She then added in an undertone, "You forget, Sire, that you wish others to believe in your passion for this girl, and yet you remain here while she is almost dying, perhaps, elsewhere."

"Ah, Madame," said the king, sighing, "how much more perfect you are in your part than I am, and how well you think of everything!" He then rose, saying loud enough for every one to hear him, "Permit me to leave you, Madame; my uneasiness is very great, and I wish to be quite certain myself that proper attention has been paid." The king left to return again to La Vallière; while all those who had been present commented upon the king's remark, "My uneasiness is very great."

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE KING'S SECRET.

On his way Louis met the Comte de Saint-Aignan. "Well, Saint-Aignan," he inquired, with affected interest, "how is the invalid?"

"Really, Sire," stammered De Saint-Aignan, "to my shame, I confess I do not know."

"What! you do not know?" said the king, pretending to take in a serious manner this want of attention to the object of his predilection.

"Will your Majesty pardon me! but I have just met one of our three loquacious wood-nymphs, and I confess that my attention has been taken away from other matters."

"Ah!" said the king, eagerly, "you have found, then—"

"The one who deigned to speak of me in such advantageous terms; and having found mine, I was searching for yours, Sire, when I had the happiness to meet your Majesty."

"Very well; but Mademoiselle de la Vallière before everything else," said the king, faithful to his part.

"Oh, our charming invalid!" said De Saint-Aignan; "how fortunately her fainting came on, since your Majesty had already occupied yourself about her!"

"What is the name of your fair lady, Saint-Aignan? Is it a secret?"

"Sire, it ought to be a secret, and a very great one, even; but your Majesty is well aware that no secret can possibly exist for you."

"Well, what is her name?"

"Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente."

"Is she pretty?"

"Exceedingly so, Sire; and I recognized the voice which pronounced my name in such tender accents. I then accosted her, questioned her as well as I was able to do, in the midst of the crowd; and she told me, without suspecting anything, that a little while ago she was under the great oak, with her two friends, when the appearance of a wolf or a robber had terrified them, and made them run away."

"But," inquired the king, eagerly, "what are the names of these two friends?"

"Sire," said De Saint-Aignan, "will your Majesty send me forthwith to the Bastille?"

"What for?"

"Because I am an egotist and a fool. My surprise was so great at such a conquest and at so fortunate a discovery that I went no further in my inquiries. Besides, I did not think that your Majesty would attach any very great importance to what you heard, preoccupied as you were with Mademoiselle de la Vallière; and then Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente left me suddenly, to return to Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"Let us hope, then, that I shall be as fortunate as yourself. Come, Saint-Aignan!"

"Your Majesty is ambitious, I perceive, and does not wish to allow any conquest to escape you. I assure you that I will conscientiously set about my inquiries; and, moreover, from one of the three Graces we shall learn the names of the others, and by the name the secret."

"I, too," said the king, "only require to hear her voice to know it again. Come, let us say no more about it, but show me where poor La Vallière is."

"Well," thought De Saint-Aignan, "the king's regard is beginning to display itself, and for that girl too! It is extraordinary; I should never have believed it." With this thought passing in his mind, he showed the king the room where La Vallière had been taken. The king entered, followed by De Saint-Aignan. In a low room, near a large window looking out upon the gardens, La Vallière, reclining in a large arm-chair, inhaled in deep draughts the balmy evening breeze. From the loosened body of her dress the lace fell in tumbled folds, mingling with the tresses of her beautiful fair hair, which lay scattered upon her shoulders. Her languishing eyes were filled with tears, though their fire was not wholly extinguished; she seemed as lifeless as those beautiful visions of our dreams, pale and romantic, which pass before the closed eyes of the sleeper, half opening their wings without moving them, unclosing their lips without a sound escaping them. The pearl like pallor of La Vallière possessed a charm which it would be impossible to describe. Mental and bodily suffering had produced upon her features a soft and noble expression of grief; from the perfect passiveness of her arms and bust, she resembled one whose soul had passed away more than a living being, — she seemed not to hear either the whisperings of her companions or the distant murmurs which arose from the neighborhood. She seemed to be communing within herself; and her beautiful, slender, and delicate hands trembled from time to time, as though from the contact of some invisible touch.

La Vallière was so completely absorbed in her reverie, that the king entered without her perceiving him. At a

distance he gazed upon her lovely face, upon which the moon shed its pure silvery light. "Good heavens!" he exclaimed, with a terror which he could not control; "she is dead."

"No, Sire," said Montalais, in a low voice; "on the contrary, she is better. Are you not better, Louise?"

But Louise did not answer. "Louise," continued Montalais, "the king has deigned to express his anxiety concerning your health."

"The king!" exclaimed Louise, starting up abruptly, as if a stream of fire had darted through her frame to her heart; "the king uneasy about my health!"

"Yes," said Montalais.

"The king is here, then?" said La Vallière, not venturing to look round her.

"That voice! that voice!" whispered Louis, eagerly, to De Saint-Aignan.

"Yes, it is so," replied De Saint-Aignan. "Your Majesty is right; it is she who declared her love for the sun."

"Hush!" said the king. And then approaching La Vallière, he said, "You are not well, Mademoiselle? Just now, indeed, in the park, I saw that you had fainted. How were you attacked?"

"Sire," stammered the poor child, pale and trembling, "I cannot tell."

"You have been walking too much," said the king; "and fatigue, perhaps —"

"No, Sire," said Montalais, eagerly, answering for her friend, "it could not be from fatigue, for we passed part of the evening seated under the royal oak."

"Under the royal oak?" returned the king, starting. "I was not deceived, — it is as I thought;" and he directed a look of intelligence at the count.

"Yes," said De Saint-Aignan, "under the royal oak, with Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente."

"How do you know that?" inquired Montalais.

"In a very simple way. Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente told me so."

"In that case she must have told you the cause of Mademoiselle de la Vallière's fainting?"

"Why, yes; she told me something about a wolf or a robber, — I forget precisely which." La Vallière listened, her eyes fixed, her bosom heaving, as if, gifted with more than ordinary acuteness of perception, she divined a portion of the truth.

Louis imagined this attitude and agitation to be the consequences of a terror but partially removed. "Nay, fear nothing, Mademoiselle," he said, with a rising emotion which he could not conceal; "the wolf which terrified you so much was simply a wolf with two legs."

"It was a man!" screamed Louise; "it was a man who was listening?"

"Suppose it were, Mademoiselle, what great evil was there in his having listened? Is it likely that even in your own opinion you would have said anything which should not have been listened to?"

La Vallière wrung her hands, and hid her face in them, as if to hide her blushes. "In Heaven's name," she said, "who was concealed there, — who was listening?"

The king advanced towards her, to take hold of one of her hands. "It was I, Mademoiselle," he said, bowing with tender respect. "Could I frighten you?"

La Vallière uttered a loud cry; for the second time her strength forsook her, and cold, moaning, and in utter despair, she again fell apparently lifeless in her chair. The king had just time to hold out his arm, so that she was partially supported by him. Mesdemoiselles de Ton-

nay-Charente and de Montalais, who stood a few paces from the king and La Vallière, motionless and almost petrified at the recollection of their conversation with La Vallière, did not think even of offering their assistance to her, feeling restrained by the presence of the king, who with one knee on the ground held La Vallière round the waist with his arm.

"You heard, Sire?" murmured Athenais. But the king did not reply; he had his eyes fixed upon La Vallière's half-closed eyes, and held her drooping hand in his own.

"Of course," replied De Saint-Aignan, who on his side, hoping that Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente would faint, advanced towards her, holding his arms extended, — "of course; we did not even lose a word." But the haughty Athenais was not a woman to faint so easily; she darted a terrible look at De Saint-Aignan and fled. Montalais, with more courage, advanced hurriedly towards Louise, and received her from the king's hands, who was already fast losing his presence of mind, as he felt his face covered by the perfumed tresses of the seemingly dying girl. "Excellent!" said De Saint-Aignan. "This is indeed an adventure; and it will be my own fault if I am not the first to relate it."

The king approached him, and with a trembling voice and a passionate gesture said, "Not a syllable, Count!"

The poor king forgot that only an hour before he had given the same man a similar recommendation, but with the very opposite intention, — namely, that the man should be indiscreet. But the latter recommendation was quite as unnecessary as the former. Half an hour afterwards all Fontainebleau knew that Mademoiselle de la Vallière had had a conversation under the royal oak with Montalais and Tonnay-Charente, and that in this conver-

sation she had confessed her love for the king. It was known, also, that the king, after having manifested the uneasiness with which the state of Mademoiselle de la Vallière's health had inspired him, had turned pale and trembled very much as he received the beautiful girl fainting in his arms; so that it was quite agreed among the courtiers that the greatest event of the period had just transpired, — that his Majesty loved Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and that consequently Monsieur could now sleep in perfect tranquillity. It was this, even, that the queen-mother, as surprised as the others by this sudden change, hastened to tell the young queen and Philip of Orléans. Only she set to work in a different manner, by attacking these two interested persons in the following way. To her daughter-in-law she said: "See now, Thérèse, how very wrong you were to accuse the king! Here they say he has given himself to-day a new mistress; why should there be any greater truth in the report of to-day than in that of yesterday, or in that of yesterday than in that of to-day?" To Monsieur, in relating to him the adventure of the royal oak, she said: "Are you not very absurd in your jealousies, my dear Philip? It is asserted that the king has lost his head over that little La Vallière. Say nothing of it to your wife; the queen would know it immediately."

This latter confidential communication had its natural result. Monsieur, who had regained his composure, went triumphantly to look after his wife; and as it was not yet midnight, and the *fête* was to continue until two in the morning, he offered her his hand for a promenade. At the end of a few paces, however, the first thing he did was to disobey his mother. "Do not go and tell any one, the queen least of all," he said mysteriously, "what people say about the king."

"What do they say about him?" inquired Madame.

"That my brother has suddenly been smitten with a strange passion."

"For whom?"

"For that little La Vallière." As it was dark, Madame could smile at her ease. "Ah!" she said, "and how long is it since this has been the case?"

"For some days, so it seems. But that was nothing but smoke, and it is only this evening that the flames of his passion have been revealed."

"The king shows his good taste," said Madame, "and in my opinion she is a very charming girl."

"I verily believe you are jesting, my dear."

"I! In what way?"

"In any case this passion will make some one very happy, even if it be only La Vallière herself."

"Really," continued the princess, "you speak, Monsieur, as if you had read into the inmost recesses of my maid-of-honor's heart. Who has told you that she agrees to return the king's affection?"

"And who has told you that she will not return it?"

"She loves the Vicomte de Bragelonne."

"You think so."

"She is even affianced to him."

"She was so."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, when they went to ask the king's permission to arrange the marriage, he refused his permission."

"Refused?"

"Yes, even to the Comte de la Fère himself, whom the king honors, you know, with the greatest regard, on account of the part he took in your brother's restoration, and in other events, also, which happened a long time ago."

"Well, the poor lovers must wait until the king is

pleased to change his opinion ; they are young, and there is time enough."

"But, my love," said Philip, laughing, "I perceive that you do not know the best part of the affair."

"No!"

"That by which the king was most deeply touched."

"The king, do you say, has been deeply touched?"

"To the very heart."

"But how, — in what manner? Tell me directly."

"By an adventure the romance of which cannot be surpassed."

"You know how I love such adventures, and yet you keep me waiting," said the princess, impatiently.

"Well, then — " and Monsieur paused.

"I am listening."

"Under the royal oak, — you know where the royal oak is?"

"What can that matter? Under the royal oak, you were saying — "

"Well! Mademoiselle de la Vallière, fancying herself alone with her two friends, revealed to them her passion for the king."

"Ah!" said Madame, beginning to be uneasy, "her passion for the king?"

"Yes."

"When was this?"

"About an hour ago."

Madame started, and then said, "And no one knew of this passion?"

"No one."

"Not even his Majesty?"

"Not even his Majesty. The little creature kept her secret most strictly to herself, when suddenly it proved stronger than herself, and so escaped her."

"And from whom did you get this absurd tale?"

"Why, as everybody else did, from La Vallière herself, who confessed her love to Montalais and Tonnay-Charente, who were her companions."

Madame stopped, and by a hasty movement dropped her husband's hand.

"Did you say it was an hour ago she made this confession?" Madame inquired.

"About that time."

"Is the king aware of it?"

"Why, that is the very thing which constitutes the romance of the affair, for the king was behind the royal oak with De Saint-Aignan, and he heard the whole of the interesting conversation without losing a single word of it."

Madame felt struck to the heart, saying incautiously, "But I have seen the king since, and he never told me a word about it."

"Of course," said Monsieur, bluntly, as a triumphant husband, "he took care not to speak of it to you himself, since he recommended every one not to say a word about it to you."

"What do you mean?" said Madame, irritated.

"I mean that they wished to keep you in ignorance of the affair altogether."

"But why should they wish to conceal it from me?"

"From the fear that your friendship for the young queen might induce you to say something about it to her; that is all."

Madame hung down her head; her feelings were grievously wounded. She could not enjoy a moment's repose until she had met the king. As a king is, most naturally, the very last person in his kingdom who knows what is said about him, in the same way that a lover is

the only one who is kept in ignorance of what is said about his mistress; so, when the king perceived Madame, who was looking for him, he approached her somewhat disturbed, but still gracious and attentive in his manner. Madame waited for him to speak about La Vallière first; but as he did not speak of her, she inquired, "And the poor girl?"

"What poor girl?" said the king.

"La Vallière. Did you not tell me, Sire, that she had fainted?"

"She is still very ill," said the king, affecting the greatest indifference.

"But surely that will prejudicially affect the rumor you were going to spread, Sire?"

"What rumor?"

"That your attention was taken up by her."

"Oh," replied the king, carelessly, "I trust it will be reported all the same."

Madame still waited. She wished to know if the king would speak to her of the adventure of the royal oak; but the king did not say a word about it. Madame, on her side, did not open her lips about the adventure; so that the king took leave of her without having reposed the slightest confidence in her. Hardly had she seen the king move away, when she set out in search of De Saint-Aignan. De Saint-Aignan was never very difficult to find; he was like the smaller vessels which always follow in the wake of the larger ships, and as tenders to them.

De Saint-Aignan was the very man whom Madame needed in her state of mind at that moment; and as for him, he only looked for worthier ears than others he had found, to have an opportunity of recounting the event with all its details, and therefore he did not spare Madame a single word of the whole affair. When he had

finished, Madame said to him, "Confess, now, that it is all a charming invention."

"Invention, — no; a true story, — yes."

"Confess, whether invention or true story, that it was told to you as you have told it to me, but that you were not there."

"Upon my honor, Madame, I was there."

"And you think that these confessions may have made an impression upon the king?"

"Certainly, as those of Mademoiselle Tonnay-Charente did upon me," replied De Saint-Aignan. "Do not forget, Madame, that Mademoiselle de la Vallière compared the king to the sun; that was flattering enough."

"The king does not permit himself to be influenced by such flatteries."

"Madame, the king is just as much man as sun; and I saw that plainly enough just now when La Vallière fell into his arms."

"La Vallière fell into the king's arms!"

"Oh, it was the most graceful picture possible! Just imagine! La Vallière had fallen back fainting, and —"

"Well, what did you see? Tell me, — speak!"

"I saw, what ten other people saw at the same time, — I saw that when La Vallière fell into his arms, the king himself almost fainted."

Madame uttered a subdued cry, the only indication of her smothered anger. "Thank you," she said, laughing in a convulsive manner; "you relate stories delightfully, M. de Saint-Aignan;" and she hurried away, alone and almost suffocated by her feelings, towards the château.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

EVENING STROLLS.

Monsieur had taken leave of the princess in the best possible humor, and feeling much fatigued by the day's events had retired to his apartments, leaving every one to finish the night as he chose. When in his room, Monsieur began to dress for the night with a careful attention, which displayed itself from time to time in fits of satisfaction. While his attendants were engaged in dressing him, he sang the principal airs of the ballet which the violins had played, and to which the king had danced. He then summoned his tailors, inspected his costumes for the next day, and in token of his extreme satisfaction distributed various presents among them. When the Chevalier de Lorraine, who had seen the prince return to the château, also came in, Monsieur overwhelmed him with kindness. The former, after having saluted the prince, remained silent for a moment, like a sharp-shooter who deliberates before deciding in what direction he will renew his fire; then, seeming to make up his mind, he said, "Have you remarked a very singular circumstance, Monseigneur?"

"No; what is it?"

"The bad reception which his Majesty in appearance gave the Comte de Guiche."

"In appearance?"

"Yes, certainly, since in reality he has restored him to favor."

"I did not notice it," said the prince.

"What! did you not see that instead of ordering him to return to his exile, as would have been natural, he encouraged him in his strange opposition by permitting him to resume his place in the ballet?"

"And you think that the king was wrong, Chevalier?" asked Monsieur.

"Are not you of my opinion, Prince?"

"Not altogether so, my dear chevalier; and I think the king was quite right not to have flown into a rage against a poor fellow more foolish than evil disposed."

"Really," said the chevalier, "so far as I am concerned, I confess that this magnanimity astonishes me in the highest degree."

"Why so?" inquired Philip.

"Because I should have thought that the king would have been more jealous," replied the chevalier, spitefully. During the last few minutes Monsieur had felt that there was something of an irritating nature concealed under his favorite's remarks; this last word, however, had ignited the powder.

"Jealous!" exclaimed the prince, — "jealous! What do you mean by that remark? Jealous of what, if you please, — or jealous of whom?"

The chevalier perceived that he had allowed one of those mischievous remarks to escape him to which he sometimes gave utterance. He endeavored, therefore, to recall it while it was still possible to do so. "Jealous of his authority," he said, with an assumed frankness; "of what else would you have the king be jealous?"

"Ah!" said Monseigneur, "that's very proper."

"Did your royal Highness," continued the chevalier, "solicit dear De Guiche's pardon?"

"No, indeed," said Monsieur. "Guiche is a clever fel-

low, and full of courage; but as I do not approve of his conduct with Madame, I wish him neither harm nor good."

The chevalier had assumed a bitterness with regard to De Guiche, as he had attempted to do with the king; but he thought that he perceived that the time for indulgence and even for the utmost indifference had arrived, and that in order to throw some light on the question it might be necessary for him to put the lamp, as the saying is, under the husband's very nose. In this game one sometimes burns others, but often gets burned himself.

"Very well, very well," said the chevalier to himself, "I shall wait for De Wardes. He will do more in one day than I in a month; for I believe — God forgive me, or rather him — that he is still more jealous than I am. Then, again, it is not De Wardes even whom I require, so much as that some event should happen; and in the whole of this affair I see none. That De Guiche returned after he had been sent away is certainly serious enough, but all its seriousness disappears when I consider that De Guiche has returned at the very moment when Madame troubles herself no longer about him. Madame, in fact, is occupied with the king; that is clear. But besides that I cannot and do not want to meddle with the king, Madame cannot be much longer occupied with the king, if, as is asserted, the king has ceased to occupy himself about her. The gist of the whole matter is that we must remain perfectly quiet, and await the arrival of some new caprice, and let that decide the whole affair." The chevalier thereupon settled himself resignedly in the armchair in which Monsieur permitted him to seat himself in his presence; and having no more spiteful or malicious remarks to make, the chevalier's wit seemed to have deserted him. Most fortunately Monsieur was endowed

with great good-humor, as has been already stated, and he had enough for two, until the time arrived for dismissing his servants and gentlemen of the chamber, and he then passed into his sleeping apartment. As he withdrew, he desired the chevalier to present his compliments to Madame, and say that as the night was cool, and as he was afraid of the toothache, he would not venture out again into the park during the remainder of the evening.

The chevalier entered the princess's apartments at the very moment when she herself entered them. He acquitted himself faithfully of the commission which had been intrusted to him, and in the first place remarked the indifference and annoyance even with which Madame received her husband's communication, — a circumstance which appeared to him fraught with something quite fresh. If Madame had been about to leave her apartments with that strangeness of manner about her, he would have followed her; but Madame was returning to them. There was nothing to be done. Therefore he turned upon his heel like an unemployed heron; seemed to question earth, air, and water about it; shook his head, and walked away mechanically in the direction of the gardens He had hardly gone a hundred paces when he met two young men, walking arm-in-arm, with their heads bent down, and idly kicking the small stones out of their path as they walked on, plunged in thought. It was De Guiche and Bragelonne, the sight of whom, as it always did, produced upon the Chevalier de Lorraine instinctively a feeling of great repugnance. He did not, however, the less on that account salute them with a very low bow, which they returned with interest. Then, observing that the park was becoming deserted, that the illuminations were beginning to burn out, and that the morning breeze

was springing up, he turned to the left and entered the château again by one of the smaller courtyards. The others turned aside to the right, and continued on their way towards the large park. As the chevalier was ascending the side staircase which led to the private entrance, he saw a woman, followed by another, make her appearance under the arcade which led from the small to the large courtyard. The two women walked so fast that the rustling of their silk dresses betrayed them in the darkness of the night. The style of their mantles, their graceful figures, a mysterious yet haughty carriage which distinguished them both, especially the one who walked first, struck the chevalier.

"I certainly know those two ladies," said he to himself, pausing upon the top step of the small staircase. Then, as with the instinct of a bloodhound he was about to follow them, one of his servants who had been running after him arrested his attention.

"Monsieur," he said, "the courier has arrived."

"Very well," said the chevalier, "there is time enough; to-morrow will do."

"There are some urgent letters which Monsieur the Chevalier would be glad to see, perhaps."

"Ah!" inquired the chevalier, "where from?"

"One from England, and the other from Calais; the latter arrived by express, and seems of great importance."

"From Calais! Who the deuce writes to me from Calais?"

"I think I can recognize the handwriting of your friend M. le Comte de Wardes."

"Oh!" cried the chevalier, forgetting his intention of acting the spy, "in that case I will come up at once." This he did, while the two unknown ladies disappeared

at the end of the court opposite to the one by which they had just entered.

We shall now follow them, and leave the chevalier undisturbed to his correspondence. When they had arrived at the grove of trees, the foremost of the two halted, somewhat out of breath, and cautiously raising her hood said, "Are we still far from the tree?"

"Yes, Madame, more than five hundred paces. But pray rest awhile; you will not be able to walk much longer at this pace."

"You are right," said the princess, — for it was she; and she leaned against a tree. "And now, Mademoiselle," she resumed, after having recovered her breath, "tell me the whole truth, and conceal nothing from me."

"Oh, Madame," said the young girl, in an agitated voice, "you are already angry with me."

"No, my dear Athenais; reassure yourself! I am in no way angry with you. After all, these things do not concern me personally. You are anxious about what you may have said under the oak, you are afraid of having offended the king; and I wish to tranquillize you by ascertaining myself if it were possible that you could have been overheard."

"Oh, yes, Madame; the king was so close to us."

"Still, you were not speaking so loud that some of your remarks may not have been lost."

"We thought that we were quite alone, Madame."

"There were three of you, you say?"

"Yes; La Vallière, Montalais, and myself."

"And you, individually, spoke in a light manner of the king?"

"I am afraid so. Should such be the case, your Highness will have the kindness to make my peace with his Majesty, will you not, Madame?"

"If there should be any occasion for it, I promise you to do so. However, as I have already told you, it will be better not to anticipate evil, and to be quite sure first that evil has been committed. The night is now very dark, and the darkness is still greater under those large trees. It is not likely that you were recognized by the king. To inform him of it, by being the first to speak, is to denounce yourself."

"Oh, Madame, Madame! if Mademoiselle de la Vallière were recognized, I must have been recognized also. Besides, M. de Saint-Aignan did not leave me a doubt on that subject."

"Did you, then, say anything very disrespectful of the king?"

"Not at all, Madame. It was one of the others who made some very flattering remarks about the king; and my remarks may have been much in contrast with hers."

"That Montalais is such a giddy girl," said Madame.

"Oh, it was not Montalais! Montalais said nothing; it was La Vallière."

Madame started as if she had not known it perfectly already. "No, no," she said; "the king cannot have heard. Besides, we will now try the experiment for which we came out. Show me the oak. Do you know where it is?" she continued.

"Alas, Madame, yes."

"And you can find it again?"

"I could find it with my eyes shut."

"That is very well, then. You will sit down on the bank where you were, where La Vallière was, and speak in the same tone and to the same effect as you did before. I will conceal myself in the thicket; and if I can hear you, I will tell you so."

"Yes, Madame."

"If, therefore, you really spoke sufficiently loud for the king to have heard you, in that case —"

Athenais seemed to await the conclusion of the phrase with some anxiety.

"In that case," said Madame, in a stifled voice, arising doubtless from her hurried progress, — "in that case, I forbid you — " And Madame again increased her pace. Suddenly, however, she stopped. "An idea occurs to me," she said.

"A good idea, no doubt, Madame," replied Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente.

"Montalais must be as much embarrassed as La Vallière and yourself."

"Less so; for she is less compromised, having said less."

"That does not matter; she will help you, I dare say, by deviating a little from the exact truth."

"Especially if she knows that your Highness is kind enough to interest yourself about me."

"Very well, I think I have discovered what we want, my dear."

"How delightful!"

"You will say that all three of you were perfectly well aware of the presence of the king behind that tree or behind that thicket, whichever it might have been; and that you knew M. de Saint-Aignan was there too."

"Yes, Madame."

"For you cannot disguise it from yourself, Athenaïs, that Saint-Aignan takes advantage of some very flattering remarks which you made about him."

"Well, Madame, you see very well that one can be overheard," cried Athenais, "since M. de Saint-Aignan overheard us."

Madame bit her lips, for she had thoughtlessly committed herself. "Oh, you know Saint-Aignan's character very well," she said; "the favor the king shows him almost turns his brain, and he talks at random, — not only that, he very often invents. Besides, that is not the question; the fact remains, Did or did not the king overhear?"

"Oh, yes, Madame, he did hear," said Athenaïs, in despair.

"In that case do what I said: maintain boldly that all three of you knew, — mind, all three of you; for if there is a doubt about any one of you, there will be a doubt about all, — persist, I say, that you all three were aware of the presence of the king and of M. de Saint-Aignan, and that you wished to amuse yourselves at the expense of those who were listening"

"Oh, Madame, at the king's expense; we never dare say that!"

"It is a simple jest; an innocent deception readily permitted in young girls, whom men wish to take by surprise. In this manner everything is explained. What Montalais said of Malicorne, a mere jest; what you said of M. de Saint-Aignan, a mere jest too; and what La Vallière might have said of — "

"And which she would have given anything to have recalled."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Perfectly so."

"Very well; an additional reason, therefore. Say that the whole affair was a mere joke. M. de Malicorne will have no occasion to get out of temper; M. de Saint-Aignan will be completely put out of countenance, — he will be laughed at instead of you; and, lastly, the king will be punished for a curiosity which was unworthy of his rank.

Let people laugh a little at the king in this affair, and I do not think he will complain of it."

"Oh, Madame, you are indeed an angel of goodness and sense."

"It is to my own advantage."

"In what way?"

"Do you ask me how it is to my advantage to spare my maids of honor remarks, annoyances, and perhaps even calumnies? Alas! you well know, my dear, that the court has no indulgence for this sort of peccadilloes. But we have now been walking for some time; shall we be long before we reach it?"

"About fifty or sixty paces farther; turn to the left, Madame, if you please."

"And so you are sure of Montalais?" said Madame.

"Oh, certainly."

"Will she do what you ask her?"

"Everything. She will be delighted."

"As for La Vallière —" ventured the princess.

"Ah, there will be some difficulty with her, Madame; she would scorn to tell a falsehood."

"Yet when it is for her interest to do so —"

"I am afraid that that would not make the slightest difference in her ideas."

"Yes, yes," said Madame, "I have been already told that. She is one of those over-nice and affectedly particular persons, who place Heaven in the foreground to conceal themselves behind it. But if she refuse to tell a falsehood, — as she will expose herself to the jests of the whole court, as she will have annoyed the king by a confession as ridiculous as it was immodest, — Mademoiselle de la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière will think it but proper that I should send her back again to her pigeons in the country, in order that in Touraine yonder or in

Le Blaisois — I know not where it may be — she may at her ease study sentiment and pastoral simplicity together." These words were uttered with a vehemence and harshness which terrified Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente; and the consequence was that so far as she was concerned, she promised to tell as many falsehoods as might be necessary. It was in this amiable frame of mind that Madame and her companion reached the neighborhood of the royal oak.

"Here we are," said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente.

"We shall soon learn if one can overhear," replied Madame.

"Hush!" said the young girl, holding Madame back with a hurried gesture, entirely forgetful of etiquette. Madame stopped.

"You see that you can hear," said Athenaïs.

"How?"

"Listen!"

Madame held her breath; and in fact the following words, pronounced by a gentle and melancholy voice, floated towards them: "I tell you, Viscount, I tell you I love her madly; I tell you I love her to distraction."

Madame started at the voice, and beneath her hood a bright joyous smile illumined her features. It was she who now stayed her companion; and with a light footstep leading her some twenty paces back, that is to say, out of the reach of the voice, she said: "Remain there, my dear Athenaïs, and let no one surprise us. I think it may be you about whom they are conversing."

"Me, Madame?"

"Yes, you; or rather your adventure. I will go and listen; if we were both there, we should be discovered. Go and fetch Montalais, and then return and wait for me with her at the entrance of the forest." And then,

as Athenaïs hesitated, the princess again said "Go!" in a voice which did not admit of reply.

Athenaïs thereupon caught up her rustling skirts, and by a path which crossed the group of trees she regained the flower-garden. As for Madame, she concealed herself in the thicket, leaning her back against a gigantic chestnut-tree, one of the roots of which had been cut in such a manner as to form a seat, and waited there full of anxiety and apprehension. "Now," she said, "since one can hear from this place, let us listen to what M. de Bragelonne and that other madly-in-love fool, the Comte de Guiche, have to say about me."

CHAPTER XLIX.

IN WHICH MADAME ACQUIRES A PROOF THAT LISTENERS CAN HEAR WHAT IS SAID.

THERE was a moment's silence, as if all the mysterious sounds of night were hushed to listen, at the same time with Madame, to these youthful and passionate disclosures.

It was Raoul's turn to speak. He leaned indolently against the trunk of the great oak, and replied in his sweet and musical voice, "Alas, my dear De Guiche, it is a great misfortune!"

"Yes," cried the latter, "great indeed!"

"You do not understand me, De Guiche. I say that it is a great misfortune for you, — not that of loving, but that of not knowing how to conceal your love."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed De Guiche.

"Yes, you do not perceive one thing; namely, that it is no longer to the only friend you have, -- in other words, to a man who would rather die than betray you: you do not perceive, I say, that it is no longer to your only friend that you confide your passion, but you betray it to the first-comer."

"To the first-comer!" exclaimed De Guiche; "are you mad, Bragelonne, to say such a thing to me?"

"The fact is so, however."

"Impossible! How, in what manner, could I have become indiscreet to such an extent?"

"I mean, my friend, that your eyes, your manner, your sighs, speak, in spite of yourself; that every unbridled

feeling leads and hurries a man beyond his own control. In such a case he ceases to be master of himself; he is a prey to a mad passion, which makes him confide his grief to the trees, to his horses, or to the air, from the very moment when he has no longer any intelligent being within reach of his voice. Besides, my poor friend, remember this: it very rarely happens that there is not always some one present to hear, especially those very things which ought not to be heard." De Guiche uttered a deep sigh. "Nay," continued Bragelonne, "you distress me; since your return here you have a hundred times and in a hundred different ways confessed your love for her; and even, had you not said anything, your return would alone have been a terrible indiscretion. I persist, then, in drawing this conclusion, — that if you do not place a greater watch over yourself than you have hitherto done, one day or another something will happen which will cause an explosion. Who will save you then? Answer me! Who will save her? — for, innocent as she will be of your affection, your affection will be an accusation against her in the hands of her enemies."

"Alas!" murmured De Guiche; and a deep sigh accompanied the exclamation.

"That is not answering me, De Guiche."

"Yes, yes."

"Well, what reply have you to make?"

"This, my friend, — that when that day arrives, I shall not be less a living being than I feel myself to be now."

"I do not understand you."

"So many vicissitudes have worn me out. At present, I am no more a thinking, acting being; at present, the most worthless of men is better than I am; therefore my remaining strength is now exhausted, my latest-formed resolutions have vanished, and I abandon myself to my

fate. When a man is out campaigning, as we have been together, and he sets off alone to reconnoitre, it sometimes happens that he meets with a party of five or six foragers, and although alone he defends himself; afterwards, five or six others arrive unexpectedly, — his anger is aroused and he persists; but if six, eight, or ten others come up, he either sets spurs to his horse, if he is still on horseback, or lets himself be slain to save an ignominious flight. Such, indeed, is my own case: first I had to struggle against myself; afterwards, against Buckingham; now, since the king is in the field, I will not contend against the king, nor even, I wish you to understand, should the king withdraw, against the nature of that woman. Still, I do not deceive myself! Having committed myself to the thraldom of that love, I will lose my life in it."

"It is not she whom you ought to reproach," replied Raoul; "it is yourself."

"Why so?"

"You know the princess's character, — somewhat giddy, easily captivated by novelty, susceptible to flattery, whether it come from a blind person or a child, — and yet you allow your passion for her to eat your very life away. Look at her; love her, if you will, — for no one whose heart is not engaged elsewhere can see her without loving her, — yet while you love her, respect, in the first place, her husband's rank, then himself, and lastly your own safety."

"Thanks, Raoul."

"For what?"

"Because, seeing how much I suffer for this woman, you endeavor to console me, — because you tell me all the good of her you think, and perhaps even that which you do not think."

"Oh," said Raoul, "there you are wrong, De Guiche!

What I think I do not always say; but in that case I say nothing. But when I speak, I know not either how to feign or to deceive; and whoever listens to me may believe me."

During this conversation Madame, her head stretched forward, with eager ear and dilated gaze endeavoring to penetrate the obscurity, thirstily drank in the faintest sound of their voices.

"Oh, I know her better than you do, then!" exclaimed De Guiche. "She is not giddy, but frivolous; she is not attracted by novelty, — she is utterly oblivious, and is without faith; she is not simply susceptible to flattery, — she is a practised and cruel coquette, a thorough coquette. Yes, yes, I am sure of it. Believe me, Bragelonne, I am suffering all the torments of hell. Brave, passionately fond of danger, I meet a danger greater than my strength and my courage; but, believe me, Raoul, I reserve for myself a victory which shall cost her floods of tears."

Raoul looked at his friend; and as the latter, almost breathless with emotion, threw back his head against the trunk of the oak, "A victory," he asked, "of what kind?"

"Of what kind, you ask?"

"Yes."

"One day I will accost her, and will address her thus: 'I was young, I was madly in love; I possessed, however, sufficient respect to throw myself at your feet, and to prostrate myself with my forehead buried in the dust, if your looks had not raised me to your hand. I fancied I understood your looks; I arose, and then, without having done anything towards you except love you yet more devotedly, if that were possible, you, a woman without heart, faith, or love, in very wantonness of disposition,

dashed me down again from mere caprice. You are unworthy, princess of the royal blood though you may be, of the love of an honest man. I offer my life as a sacrifice for having loved you too tenderly, and I die hating you.'"

"Oh!" cried Raoul, terrified at the accents of profound sincerity which the young man's words betrayed, "I was right in saying you were mad, De Guiche."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed De Guiche, following out his own idea; "since there are no wars here now, I will flee yonder to the north, seek service in the Empire, where some Hungarian or Croat or Turk will kindly put me out of my misery at once."

De Guiche did not finish; or rather, as he finished, a sound made him start, and at the same moment made Raoul leap to his feet. As for De Guiche, buried in his own thoughts, he remained seated, with his head tightly pressed between his hands. The bushes were pushed aside, and a woman, pale and much agitated, appeared before the two young men. With one hand she held back the branches which would have struck her face, and with the other she raised the hood of the mantle which covered her shoulders. By her clear and lustrous glance, by her lofty carriage, by her haughty attitude, and still more than all by the throbbing of his own heart, De Guiche recognized Madame, and uttering a loud cry he removed his hands from his temples, and covered his eyes with them. Raoul, trembling and out of countenance, fumbled with his hat, and merely muttered a few formal words of respect.

"M. de Bragelonne," said the princess, "have the goodness, I beg, to see if my attendants are not somewhere yonder, either in the walks or in the groves; and you, Monsieur the Count, remain here, — I am tired, and you will perhaps give me your arm."

Had a thunderbolt fallen at the feet of the unhappy young man, he would have been less terrified than by her cold and severe tone. However, as he himself had just said, he was brave; and as in the depths of his own heart he had just decisively made up his mind, De Guiche arose, and observing Bragelonne's hesitation turned towards him a glance full of resignation and of grateful acknowledgment. Instead of immediately answering Madame, he even advanced a step towards the viscount, and holding out towards him the hand which the princess had just desired him to give her, pressed the loyal hand of his friend in his own with a sigh, in which he seemed to give to friendship all the life that was left in the depths of his heart.

Madame, who in her pride had never known what it was to wait, now waited until this mute colloquy was ended. Her royal hand remained suspended in the air; and when Raoul had left, it sank without anger, but not without emotion, into that of De Guiche. They were alone in the depths of the dark and silent forest, and nothing could be heard but Raoul's hastily retreating footsteps along the obscure paths. Over their heads was extended the thick and fragrant vault of branches, through the occasional openings of which the stars could be seen glittering. Madame softly drew De Guiche about a hundred paces away from that indiscreet tree which had heard and had allowed so many things to be heard during that evening; and leading him to a neighboring glade, so that they could see a certain distance around them, she said in a trembling voice, "I have brought you here, because yonder, where we were, everything can be overheard."

"Everything can be overheard, did you say, Madame?" replied the young man, mechanically.

"Yes."

"Which means —" murmured De Guiche.

"Which means that I have heard every syllable you have said."

"Oh, Heaven! this only was wanting to destroy me," stammered De Guiche; and he hung down his head, like an exhausted swimmer beneath the wave which engulfs him.

"And so," Madame began, "you judge me as you have said?"

De Guiche grew pale, turned his head aside, and was silent; he felt almost on the point of fainting.

"I do not complain," continued the princess, in a tone of voice full of gentleness. "I prefer a frankness which wounds me, to flattery which would deceive me. And so, according to your opinion, M. de Guiche, I am a coquette and a worthless creature?"

"Worthless!" cried the young man, — "you worthless! Oh, most certainly I did not say, I could not have said, that that which was the most precious object in life for me could be worthless! No, no; I did not say that."

"A woman who sees a man perish, consumed by the fire she has kindled, and who does not allay that fire, is, in my opinion, a worthless woman."

"What can it matter to you what I said?" returned the count. "What am I, compared to you, and why should you even trouble yourself to know whether I exist or not?"

"M. de Guiche, both you and I are human beings; and knowing you as I do, I do not wish you to risk your life. With you I will change my conduct and character. I will be, not frank, — for I am always so, — but truthful. I implore you, therefore, Monsieur the Count, to love me no more, and to forget entirely that I have ever addressed a word or a glance to you."

De Guiche turned, bending a look full of passionate devotion upon her. "You," he said, — "you excuse yourself! you implore me!"

"Certainly; since I have done the evil, I ought to repair the evil I have done. And so, Monsieur the Count, this is the agreement; you will forgive my frivolity and my coquetry — nay, do not interrupt me; I will forgive you for having said I was frivolous and a coquette, or something worse perhaps; and you will renounce your idea of dying, and will preserve for your family, for the king, and for our sex a cavalier whom every one esteems, and whom many hold dear." Madame pronounced this last word with such an accent of frankness and even of tenderness that the poor young man's heart seemed ready to burst.

"Oh, Madame, Madame!" he stammered.

"Nay, listen further," she continued. "When you shall have renounced all thought of me forever, — from necessity in the first place, and afterwards because you will yield to my entreaty, — then you will judge me more favorably, and I am convinced that you will replace this love (forgive the folly of the expression) by a sincere friendship, which you will be ready to offer me, and which I assure you shall be cordially accepted."

De Guiche, his forehead bedewed with perspiration, a feeling of death in his heart, and a trembling agitation through his whole frame, bit his lip, stamped his foot on the ground, and, in a word, devoured the bitterness of his grief. "Madame," he said, "what you offer is impossible, and I cannot accept such conditions."

"What!" said Madame; "do you refuse my friendship?"

"No, no! I need not your friendship, Madame; I prefer to die from love than to live for friendship."

"Monsieur the Count!"

"Oh, Madame!" cried De Guiche, "I have come to that supreme moment in which no other consideration and no other duty exists than the consideration and duty of a man of honor towards the woman he worships. Drive me away, curse me, denounce me, — you will be perfectly right. I have uttered complaints against you, but I complained so bitterly because I love you; I have said that I would die, and die I shall. If I lived, you would forget me; but dead, you would never forget me, I am sure."

And meanwhile Madame, who was standing buried in thought, and as agitated as the young man himself, turned aside her head as he but a minute before had turned aside his. Then, after a moment's pause, she said, "And you love me then, very much?"

"Madly, — madly enough to die from it, whether you drive me from you or whether you listen to me still."

"It is, then, a hopeless case," she said in a playful manner, — "a case which must be treated with soothing applications. Give me your hand; it is as cold as ice."

De Guiche knelt down and pressed to his lips not one, but both, of Madame's burning hands.

"Love me, then," said the princess, "since it cannot be otherwise;" and almost imperceptibly she pressed his fingers, raising him thus, partly in the manner of a queen and partly as a fond and affectionate woman would have done. De Guiche trembled from head to foot; and Madame, who felt how passion coursed through every fibre of his being, knew that he indeed loved truly. "Give me your arm, Count," she said, "and let us return."

"Ah, Madame!" said the count, bewildered and with

unsteady step, a fiery mist before his eyes, "you have discovered a third way of killing me."

"But happily it is the longest, is it not?" Madame replied, as she led him towards the grove of trees she had left.

CHAPTER L.

ARAMIS'S CORRESPONDENCE.

WHILE De Guiche's affairs, which had been thus suddenly set to rights without his having been able to guess the cause of their improvement, assumed that unexpected change which we have seen them take, Raoul, in obedience to Madame's request, had withdrawn in order not to interrupt an explanation the results of which he was far from guessing, and he had joined the ladies of honor who were walking about in the flower-gardens.

During this time the Chevalier de Lorraine, who had returned to his own room, read De Wardes's letter with surprise; for it informed him, by the hand of his valet, of the sword-thrust received at Calais and of all the details of the adventure, and invited him to communicate to De Guiche and to Monsieur whatever there might be in the affair likely to be particularly disagreeable to either of them. De Wardes particularly endeavored to prove to the chevalier the violence of Madame's affection for Buckingham, and he finished his letter by declaring that he thought this feeling was returned. The chevalier shrugged his shoulders on reading the latter paragraph; and in fact De Wardes was very much behindhand, as may have been seen. De Wardes was still only at Buckingham's affair. The chevalier threw the letter over his shoulder upon an adjoining table, and said in a disdainful tone: "It is really incredible! That poor De Wardes is not deficient in intelligence; but

truly he does appear so in this matter, so easy is it to grow rusty in the country. The deuce take the simpleton, who ought to have written to me about matters of importance, and who writes such silly stuff as that! If it had n't been for that miserable letter, which has no sense at all in it, I should have detected in the grove yonder a charming little intrigue, which would have compromised a woman, would have perhaps been as good as a sword-thrust for a man, and have diverted Monsieur for some days to come"

He looked at his watch. "It is now too late," he said. "One o'clock in the morning, every one must have returned to the king's apartments, where the night is to be finished. Well, the scent is lost; and unless some extraordinary chance —" And thus saying, as if to appeal to his good star, the chevalier, much out of temper, approached the window, which looked out upon a somewhat solitary part of the garden. Immediately, and as if some evil genius had been at his orders, he perceived returning towards the château, accompanied by a man, a silk mantle of a dark color, and recognized the figure which had attracted his attention half an hour previously.

"Eh! *mon Dieu!*" he thought, clapping his hands together; "here is my mystery!" and he started precipitately down the staircase, hoping to reach the court-yard in time to recognize the woman in the mantle and her companion. But as he arrived at the door in the little court, he nearly ran against Madame, whose radiant face seemed full of charming revelations beneath the mantle which protected without concealing her. Unfortunately, Madame was alone. The chevalier knew that since he had seen her not five minutes before with a gentleman, the gentleman in question could not

be far off. Consequently he hardly took time to salute the princess as he drew up to allow her to pass; then, when she had advanced a few steps with the rapidity of a woman who fears recognition, and when the chevalier perceived that she was too much occupied with her own thoughts to trouble herself about him, he darted into the garden, looked hastily about on every side, and embraced within his glance as much of the horizon as he possibly could. He was just in time. The gentleman who had accompanied Madame was still in sight; only he was rapidly hurrying towards one of the wings of the château, behind which he was just on the point of disappearing. There was not a minute to be lost. The chevalier darted in pursuit of him, prepared to slacken his pace as he approached the unknown; but in spite of the diligence he used, the unknown had disappeared behind the flight of steps before he reached the spot.

It was evident, however, that as he whom the chevalier pursued was walking quietly, in a very pensive manner, with his head bent down either beneath the weight of grief or of happiness, when once the angle was passed, unless indeed he were to enter by some door or other, the chevalier could not fail to overtake him. And this certainly would have happened if at the very moment when he turned the angle the chevalier had not run against two persons, who were themselves turning it in the opposite direction. The chevalier was quite ready to seek a quarrel with these two troublesome intruders, when raising his head he recognized Monsieur the Superintendent.

Fouquet was accompanied by a person whom the chevalier now saw for the first time. This stranger was his Grace the Bishop of Vannes. Checked by the important character of the individual, and obliged by propriety to

make his own excuses when he expected to receive them, the chevalier stepped back a pace or two. And as M. Fouquet possessed, if not the friendship, at least the respect of every one; as the king himself, although he was rather his enemy than his friend, treated M. Fouquet as a man of great consideration, — the chevalier did what the king would have done; namely, he bowed to M. Fouquet, who returned his salutation with kindly politeness, perceiving that the gentleman had run against him by mistake and without any intention of being rude. Then almost immediately afterwards, having recognized the Chevalier de Lorraine, he made a few civil remarks, to which the chevalier was obliged to reply. Brief as the conversation was, the Chevalier de Lorraine saw with the most unfeigned displeasure the figure of his unknown becoming less and less in the distance, and fast disappearing in the darkness. The chevalier resigned himself, and once resigned, gave his entire attention to M. Fouquet. "You arrive late, Monsieur," he said. "Your absence has occasioned great surprise, and I heard Monsieur express himself as much astonished that having been invited by the king, you had not come."

"It was impossible for me to do so, Monsieur; but I came as soon as I was free."

"Is Paris quiet?"

"Perfectly so. Paris has received the last tax very well."

"Ah, I understand! You wished to assure yourself of this good feeling before you came to participate in our festivities."

"I have arrived, however, somewhat late to enjoy them. I will ask you therefore, Monsieur, to inform me if the king is within the château, if I shall be able to see him to-night, or if I am to wait until to-morrow."

"We lost sight of the king about half an hour ago," said the chevalier.

"Perhaps he is in Madame's apartments," inquired Fouquet.

"Not in Madame's apartments, I should think, for I have just met Madame as she was entering by the small staircase; and unless the gentleman whom you just now passed was the king himself — " and the chevalier paused, hoping that in this manner he might learn who it was he had been pursuing.

But Fouquet, whether he had or had not recognized De Guiche, simply replied, "No, Monsieur, it was not he."

The chevalier, disappointed, saluted them; but as he did so, casting a parting glance around him, and perceiving M. Colbert in the centre of a group, he said to the superintendent, "Stay, Monsieur! there is some one under the trees yonder, who will be able to inform you better than myself."

"Who?" asked Fouquet, whose near-sightedness prevented his seeing through the darkness.

"M. Colbert," returned the chevalier.

"Ah, indeed! That person, then, who is speaking yonder to those men with torches in their hands is M. Colbert?"

"M. Colbert himself. He is giving his orders for to-morrow to the workmen who are arranging the lamps for the illuminations."

"Thank you, Monsieur," said Fouquet, with an inclination of the head which indicated that he had obtained all the information he wished. The chevalier, on his side, having on the contrary learned nothing at all, withdrew with a profound salutation.

He had scarcely left, when Fouquet, knitting his brows, fell into a deep reverie. Aramis looked at him for a

moment with a mingled feeling of compassion and sadness. "What!" he said to him; "that man's name alone seems to affect you. Is it possible that, full of triumph and delight as you were just now, the sight merely of that apparition is capable of dispiriting you? Tell me, Monsieur, have you faith in your good star?"

"No," replied Fouquet, dejectedly.

"Why not?"

"Because I am too full of happiness at this present moment," he replied in a trembling voice. "Ah, my dear D'Herblay, you, who are so learned, will remember the history of a certain tyrant of Samos. What can I throw into the sea to avert approaching evil? Yes, I repeat it once more, my friend: I am too happy, — so happy that I wish for nothing beyond what I have. I have risen so high, — you know my motto, *Quo non ascendam*, — I have risen so high that nothing is left to me but to descend. I cannot believe in the progress of a success which is already more than human"

Aramis smiled as he fixed his kind and penetrating glance upon Fouquet. "If I were aware of the cause of your happiness," he said, "I should probably dread your disgrace; but you regard me in the light of a true friend, — I mean, you turn to me in misfortune, nothing more. Even that is an immense and precious boon, I know; but the truth is, I have a just right to beg you to confide in me, from time to time, any fortunate circumstances which may befall you, and in which I should rejoice, you know, more than if they had befallen myself."

"My dear prelate," said Fouquet, laughing, "my secrets are of too profane a character to confide them to a bishop, however great a worldling he may be."

"Bah! in confession?"

"Oh, I should blush too much if you were my confessor!" and Fouquet began to sigh. Aramis again looked at him without any other betrayal of his thoughts than a quiet smile.

"Well," he said, "discretion is a great virtue."

"Silence!" said Fouquet, "that venomous beast has recognized me, and is coming this way."

"Colbert?"

"Yes. Leave me, my dear D'Herblay; I do not wish that dirty pedant to see you with me, or he will take an aversion to you."

Aramis pressed his hand, saying, "What need have I of his friendship, while you are here?"

"Yes, but I may not be always here," replied Fouquet, dejectedly.

"On that day, then, if that day should ever come," said Aramis, tranquilly, "we will think over a means of dispensing with M. Colbert's friendship, or of braving his dislike. But tell me, my dear Fouquet, instead of conversing with this dirty pedant, as you did him the honor to style him, — a conversation the utility of which I do not perceive, — why do you not pay a visit, if not to the king, at least to Madame?"

"To Madame!" said the superintendent, his mind occupied by his fond reminiscences. "Yes, certainly, to Madame."

"You remember," continued Aramis, "that we have been told that Madame stands high in favor during the last two or three days. It enters into your policy, I think, and forms part of our plans, that you should assiduously devote yourself to his Majesty's friends. It is a means of counteracting the growing influence of M. Colbert. Present yourself, therefore, as soon as possible to Madame, and treat this ally with consideration."

"But," said Fouquet, "are you quite sure that it is really upon her that the king has his eyes fixed at the present moment?"

"If the needle has turned, it must be since the morning. You know I have my police."

"Very well. I will go there at once; and at all events I shall have a means of introduction, in the shape of a magnificent pair of antique cameos set round with diamonds."

"I have seen them, and nothing could be more costly and regal."

At this moment they were interrupted by a servant followed by a courier. "For Monsieur the Superintendent," said the courier, aloud, presenting a letter to Fouquet.

"For his Grace the Bishop of Vannes," said the lackey, in a low tone, handing Aramis a letter. And as the lackey carried a torch, he placed himself between the superintendent and the bishop, so that both of them could read at the same time. As Fouquet looked at the fine and delicate writing on the envelope, he started with delight; they who love or who are beloved will understand his anxiety in the first place, and his happiness in the next. He hastily tore open the letter, which contained only these words, —

"It is but an hour since I left you; it is an age since I told you that I love you."

And that was all. Madame de Bellière had, in fact, left Fouquet about an hour previously, after having passed two days with him; and apprehensive lest remembrance of her might be banished for too long a period from the heart she missed, she despatched a courier to him as the bearer of this important communication. Fouquet kissed

the letter, and rewarded the bearer with a handful of gold.

As for Aramis, he on his side was engaged in reading, but with more coolness and deliberation, the following note: —

"The king has this evening been struck with a strange fancy. A woman loves him; he learned it accidentally as he was listening to the conversation of this young girl with her companions, and his Majesty has entirely abandoned himself to this new caprice. The girl's name is Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and her beauty is passable enough to warrant this caprice becoming a strong attachment. Beware of Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

There was not a word about Madame. Aramis slowly folded the note and put it in his pocket. Fouquet was still engaged in inhaling the perfume of his epistle.

"Monseigneur," said Aramis, touching Fouquet's arm.

"Yes; what is it?" he asked.

"An idea has just occurred to me. Are you acquainted with a young girl by the name of La Vallière?"

"Not at all."

"Reflect a little."

"Ah, yes! I believe so, — one of Madame's maids of honor."

"That must be the one."

"Well, what then?"

"Well, Monseigneur, it is to that young girl you must pay your visit this evening."

"Bah! why so?"

"Nay, more than that, it is to that young girl you must present your cameos."

"Nonsense!"

"You know, Monseigneur, that my advice is not to be regarded lightly."

"Yet this unforeseen — "

"That is my affair. Pay your court in due form to little La Vallière, Monseigneur. I will be your guarantee with Madame de Bellière that your devotion is altogether politic."

"What do you mean, my friend?" exclaimed Fouquet, quickly; "and whose name have you just pronounced?"

"A name which ought to convince you, Monsieur the Superintendent, that as I am so well informed about yourself, I may possibly be as well informed about others. Pay your court, therefore, to La Vallière."

"I will pay my court to whomsoever you like," replied Fouquet, his heart filled with happiness.

"Come, come! descend again to the earth, traveller of the seventh heaven!" said Aramis; "here is M. de Colbert. He has been recruiting while we were reading; see how he is surrounded, praised, congratulated; he is decidedly becoming powerful."

In fact, Colbert was advancing, escorted by all the courtiers who remained in the gardens, every one of whom was so complimenting him upon the arrangements of the *fête* as to puff him up so that he could hardly contain himself.

"If La Fontaine were here," said Fouquet, smiling, "what an admirable opportunity for him to recite his fable of 'The Frog that wished to make itself as big as the Ox'!"

Colbert came up in the centre of a circle blazing with light. Fouquet awaited his approach unmoved, and with a slightly mocking smile. Colbert smiled too; he had been observing his enemy during the last quarter of an hour, and had been approaching him gradually. Colbert's smile was a presage of hostility.

"Oh!" said Aramis, in a low tone, to the superin-

tendent; "the scoundrel is going to ask you again for a few more millions to pay for his fireworks and his colored lamps."

Colbert was the first to make his salute, and with an air which he endeavored to render respectful. Fouquet hardly moved his head.

"Well, Monseigneur," asked Colbert, "what do your eyes say? Have we shown good taste?"

"Perfect taste," replied Fouquet, without permitting the slightest tone of raillery to be remarked in his words.

"Oh," said Colbert, maliciously, "you are treating us with indulgence! Some of us servants of the king are poor; and Fontainebleau is in no way to be compared as a residence with Vaux."

"Quite true," replied Fouquet, coolly, who domineered over all the participants in this scene.

"But what can we do, Monseigneur?" continued Colbert; "we have done our best according to our slender resources."

Fouquet made a gesture of assent.

"But," pursued Colbert, "it would be only a proper display of your magnificence, Monseigneur, if you were to offer to his Majesty a *fête* in your wonderful gardens, — in those gardens which have cost you sixty millions."

"Seventy-two," said Fouquet.

"An additional reason," returned Colbert; "it would indeed be truly magnificent."

"But do you suppose, Monsieur," said Fouquet, "that his Majesty would deign to accept my invitation?"

"I have no doubt whatever of it," cried Colbert, hastily; "I will guarantee that he does."

"You are exceedingly kind," said Fouquet. "I may depend on it, then?"

"Yes, Monseigneur; yes, certainly."

"Then I will consider it," said Fouquet.

"Accept, accept!" whispered Aramis, eagerly.

"You will consider it?" repeated Colbert.

"Yes," replied Fouquet, "in order to know what day I shall submit my invitation to the king."

"Oh, this very evening, Monseigneur, this very evening!"

"Agreed," said the superintendent. "Messieurs, I should wish to extend to you my invitations; but you know that wherever the king goes he is in his own palace, — it is by his Majesty, therefore, that you must be invited."

A murmur of delight immediately arose. Fouquet bowed and left.

"Proud and haughty man," said Colbert, "you accept, and you know it will cost you ten millions."

"You have ruined me," said Fouquet, in a low tone to Aramis.

"I have saved you," replied the latter; while Fouquet ascended the flight of steps and inquired whether the king were still visible.

CHAPTER LI.

THE ORDERLY CLERK.

The king, anxious to be again quite alone, in order to reflect well upon what was passing in his heart, had withdrawn to his own apartments, where M. de Saint-Aignan had, after his conversation with Madame, gone to meet him. This conversation has already been related. The favorite, vain of his twofold importance, feeling that he had become during the last two hours the confidant of the king, became less reverential, and began to treat the affairs of the court in a somewhat indifferent manner; from the position in which he had placed himself, or rather where chance had placed him, he saw nothing but love and garlands of flowers around him. The king's love for Madame, that of Madame for the king, that of De Guiche for Madame, that of La Vallière for the king, that of Malicorne for Montalais, that of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente for him, De Saint-Aignan, — was not all this, truly, more than enough to turn the head of any courtier? Besides, De Saint-Aignan was the model of all courtiers, past, present, and future; and, moreover, De Saint-Aignan showed himself such an excellent narrator, and was so discerningly appreciative, that the king listened to him with an appearance of great interest, particularly when he described the excited manner with which Madame had sought for him to converse about the affair of Mademoiselle de la Vallière. Although the king no longer experienced for Madame Henrietta any remains of

the passion he had once felt for her, there was, in this eagerness of Madame to procure information about him, a gratification for his vanity from which he could not free himself. He experienced this gratification, then, but nothing more; and his heart was not for a single moment alarmed at what Madame might or might not think of this whole adventure.

When, however, De Saint-Aignan had finished, the king, while preparing to retire to rest, asked, "Now, Saint-Aignan, you know what Mademoiselle de la Vallière is, do you not?"

"Not only what she is, but what she will be."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that she is everything that a woman can wish to be,—that is to say, beloved by your Majesty; I mean that she will be everything your Majesty may wish her to be."

"That is not what I am asking. I do not wish to know what she is to-day, or what she will be to-morrow,—as you have remarked, that is my affair,— but what she was yesterday. Repeat to me what others say of her."

"They say that she is chaste."

"Oh," said the king, smiling, "that is but report!"

"But rare enough at court, Sire, to believe it when it is spread."

"Perhaps you are right, my friend. Is she well-born?"

"Excellently so; the daughter of the Marquis de la Vallière, and step-daughter of that good M. de Saint-Remy."

"Ah, yes, my aunt's major-domo! I remember that; and I remember now that I saw her as I passed through Blois. She was presented to the queens. I have even to reproach myself that I did not on that occasion pay her all the attention she deserved."

"Oh, Sire, I trust that your Majesty will repair the time you have lost!"

"And the report, you tell me, is that Mademoiselle de la Vallière never had a lover."

"In any case, I do not think your Majesty would be much alarmed at any rivalry."

"Yet, stay!" exclaimed the king, all at once, in a very serious tone of voice.

"Your Majesty?"

"I remember."

"Ah!"

"If she has no lover, she has at least a betrothed."

"A betrothed!"

"What! Count, do you not know that?"

"No."

"You, — the man who knows all the news?"

"Your Majesty will excuse me. Your Majesty knows this betrothed, then?"

"Assuredly! His father came to ask me to sign the marriage contract; it is —" The king was about to pronounce the Vicomte de Bragelonne's name, when he stopped and knitted his brows.

"It is —" repeated De Saint-Aignan, inquiringly.

"I don't remember now," replied Louis XIV., endeavoring to conceal an annoyance which he had some trouble to disguise.

"Can I put your Majesty in the way?" inquired the Comte de Saint-Aignan.

"No; for I myself no longer know to whom I intended to refer. Indeed, I only remember very indistinctly that one of the maids of honor was to marry — the name, however, has escaped me."

"Was it Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente he was going to marry?" inquired De Saint-Aignan.

"Very likely," said the king.

"In that case the intended was M. de Montespan; but Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente did not speak of it, it seemed to me, in such a manner as would frighten away suitors."

"At all events," said the king, "I know nothing, or almost nothing, about Mademoiselle de la Vallière. Saint-Aignan, I rely upon you to procure me some information about her."

"Yes, Sire; and when shall I have the honor of seeing your Majesty again, to give you the information?"

"Whenever you shall have procured it."

"I shall obtain it speedily if the information will come as quickly as my wish to see your Majesty again."

"Well said! By the by, has Madame displayed any ill-feeling against this poor girl?"

"None, Sire."

"Madame did not get angry, then?"

"I do not know; I only know that she laughed continually."

"Very well; but I think I hear voices in the anterooms, — no doubt a courier has just arrived. Inquire, Saint-Aignan."

The count ran to the door and exchanged a few words with the usher; he returned to the king, saying, "Sire, it is M. Fouquet, who has this moment arrived by your Majesty's orders, he says. He presented himself, but because of the advanced hour he does not press for an audience this evening, and is satisfied to have his presence here formally announced."

"M. Fouquet! I wrote to him at three o'clock, inviting him to be at Fontainebleau to-morrow morning, and he arrives at Fontainebleau at eleven o'clock. This is, indeed, zeal!" exclaimed the king, delighted to see him-

self so promptly obeyed. "On the contrary, M. Fouquet shall have his audience. I summoned him, and will receive him. Let him be introduced. As for you, Count, pursue your inquiries, and be here to-morrow."

The king placed his finger on his lips; and De Saint-Aignan, his heart overflowing with delight, hastily withdrew, giving the order to the usher to introduce M. Fouquet, who thereupon entered the king's apartment. Louis XIV. rose to receive him.

"Good-evening, M. Fouquet," he said, smiling graciously. "I congratulate you on your punctuality; and yet my message must have reached you late?"

"At nine in the evening, Sire."

"You have been working very hard lately, M. Fouquet, for I have been informed that you have not left your office at St. Mandé during the last three or four days."

"I have, in fact, Sire, kept myself shut up for the past three days," replied Fouquet, bowing.

"Do you know, M. Fouquet, that I have a great many things to say to you?" continued the king, with his most gracious air.

"Your Majesty overwhelms me; and since you are so graciously disposed towards me, will your Majesty permit me to remind you of the promise your Majesty made me to grant an audience?"

"Ah, yes; some church dignitary, who thinks he has to thank me for something, is it not?"

"Precisely so, Sire. The hour is perhaps badly chosen. But the time of the companion whom I have brought with me is valuable; and as Fontainebleau is on the way to his diocese —"

"Who is it, then?"

"The last bishop of Vannes, whom your Majesty by my recommendation condescended to invest three months since."

"That is very possible," said the king, who had signed the appointment without reading; "and is he here?"

"Yes, Sire. Vannes is an important diocese. The flock belonging to this pastor need his religious consolation; they are savages, whom it is necessary to polish at the same time that he instructs them, and M. d'Herblay is unequalled in missions of that kind."

"M. d'Herblay!" said the king, musingly, as if that name, heard long since, was not however unknown to him.

"Oh!" said Fouquet, promptly, "your Majesty is not acquainted with the obscure name of one of your most faithful and most valuable servants?"

"No, I confess I am not. And so he wishes to set off again?"

"He has this very day received letters which will perhaps necessitate his departure; so that, before setting off for that unknown region called Bretagne, he is desirous of paying his respects to your Majesty."

"Is he waiting?"

"He is here, Sire."

"Let him enter."

Fouquet made a sign to the usher in attendance, who was waiting behind the tapestry. The door opened, and Aramis entered. The king allowed him to finish the compliments which he addressed to him, and fixed a long look upon a countenance which no one could forget, after having once beheld it.

"Vannes!" he said; "you are Bishop of Vannes, Monsieur?"

"Yes, Sire."

"Vannes is in Bretagne, I think?"

Aramis bowed.

"Near the sea?"

Aramis again bowed.

"A few leagues from Belle-Isle, is it not?"

"Yes, Sire," replied Aramis; "six leagues, I believe."

"Six leagues; a mere step, then," said Louis XIV.

"Not for us poor Bretons, Sire," replied Aramis. "Six leagues, on the contrary, is a great distance if it be six leagues on land, and an immense distance if it be leagues on the sea. Now, I have had the honor to mention to your Majesty that there are six leagues of sea from the river to Belle-Isle."

"It is said that M. Fouquet has a very beautiful house there?" inquired the king.

"Yes, it is said so," said Aramis, looking quietly at Fouquet.

"What do you mean by 'it is said so'?" exclaimed the king.

"He has, Sire."

"Really, M. Fouquet, I must confess that one circumstance surprises me."

"What may that be?"

"Why, that you should have at the head of your parishes a man like M. d'Herblay, and yet should not have shown him Belle-Isle?"

"Oh, Sire," replied the bishop, without giving Fouquet time to answer, "we poor Breton prelates seldom leave our residences."

"M. de Vannes," said the king, "I will punish M. Fouquet for his indifference."

"In what way, Sire?"

"I will change your bishopric."

Fouquet bit his lips, but Aramis only smiled.

"What income does Vannes bring you in?" continued the king.

"Six thousand livres, Sire," said Aramis.

"So trifling an amount as that! But you possess other property, M. de Vannes?"

"I have nothing else, Sire; only, M. Fouquet pays me twelve hundred livres a year for his churchwarden's pew."

"Well, well, M. d'Herblay, I promise you something better than that."

"Sire —"

"I will not forget you."

Aramis bowed; and the king also bowed to him in a respectful manner, as he was always accustomed to do to women and members of the Church. Aramis understood that his audience was at an end; he took his leave of the king in the simple, unpretending language of a country pastor, and disappeared.

"His is, indeed, a remarkable face," said the king, following him with his eyes as long as he could see him, and even to a certain degree when he was no longer to be seen.

"Sire," replied Fouquet, "if that bishop had been educated early in life, no prelate in the kingdom would deserve the highest distinctions better than he."

"His learning is not extensive, then?"

"He changed the sword for the chasuble, and that rather late in life. But it matters little, if your Majesty will permit me to speak of M. de Vannes again in a time and place —"

"I beg you to do so. But before speaking of him, let us speak of yourself, M. Fouquet."

"Of me, Sire?"

"Yes, I have to pay you a thousand compliments."

"I really cannot express to your Majesty the delight with which you overwhelm me."

"Yes, M. Fouquet, I understand you. I confess, however, to have had certain prejudices against you."

"In that case I was indeed unfortunate, Sire."

"But they exist no longer. Did you not perceive —"

"I did indeed, Sire. But I awaited with resignation the day when truth would prevail; and it seems that that day has now arrived."

"Ah! you knew, then, you were in disgrace with me?"

"Alas, Sire, yes!"

"And do you know the reason?"

"Perfectly well; your Majesty thought that I had been wastefully lavish in expenditure."

"Oh, no!"

"Or, rather, an indifferent administrator. In a word, your Majesty thought that as the people had no money there would be none for your Majesty either."

"Yes, I thought so; but I was deceived."

Fouquet bowed.

"And no disturbances, no complaints?"

"And money enough," said Fouquet.

"The fact is that you have been profuse with it during the last month."

"I have more still, not only for all your Majesty's requirements, but for all your caprices."

"Thank Heaven! M. Fouquet," replied the king, seriously, "I will not put you to the proof. For the next two months I do not intend to ask you for anything."

"I will avail myself of the interval to amass for your Majesty five or six millions, which will be serviceable as money in hand in case of war."

"Five or six millions!"

"For the expenses of your Majesty's household only, be it understood."

"You think that war is probable, M. Fouquet?"

"I think that if Heaven has bestowed on the eagle a beak and claws, it is to enable him to show his royal character."

The king blushed with pleasure. "We have spent a

great deal of money these few days past, M. Fouquet; will you not scold me for it?"

"Sire, your Majesty has still twenty years of youth to enjoy, and a thousand million livres to spend in those twenty years."

"A thousand million! that is a great deal of money, M. Fouquet," said the king.

"I will economize, Sire. Besides, your Majesty has two valuable men in M. Colbert and myself. The one will encourage you to be prodigal with your money,—and this shall be myself, if my services should continue to be agreeable to your Majesty; and the other will economize for you, and this will be M. Colbert's province."

"M. Colbert?" returned the king, astonished.

"Certainly, Sire; M. Colbert is an excellent accountant."

At this commendation bestowed by the enemy on the enemy himself, the king felt himself penetrated with confidence and admiration. There was not, moreover, either in Fouquet's voice or look anything which injuriously affected a single syllable of the remark he had made; he did not pass one eulogium, as it were, in order to acquire the right of making two reproaches. The king comprehended him, and yielding to so much generosity and address he said, "You praise M. Colbert, then?"

"Yes, Sire, I praise him; for besides being a man of merit, I believe him to be very devoted to your Majesty's interests."

"Is that because he has often interfered with your own views?" said the king, smiling.

"Exactly, Sire."

"Explain that to me."

"It is simple enough. I am the man who is needed to make the money come in; he, the man who is needed to prevent it from leaving."

"Nay, nay, Monsieur the Superintendent, you will presently say something which will amend all this good opinion?"

"Do you mean so far as administrative abilities are concerned, Sire?"

"Yes."

"Not in the slightest."

"Really?"

"Upon my honor, Sire, I do not know throughout France a better clerk than M. Colbert."

This word "clerk" did not possess, in 1661, the somewhat subservient signification which is attached to it in the present day; but as spoken by Fouquet, whom the king had just addressed as Monsieur the Superintendent, it seemed to acquire an insignificant and petty character, which served admirably to restore Fouquet to his own place, and Colbert to his.

"And yet," said Louis XIV., "it was he, nevertheless, who notwithstanding his economy had the arrangement of my *fêtes* here at Fontainebleau, and I assure you, M. Fouquet, that in no way has he interfered with the expenditure of my money."

Fouquet bowed, but did not reply.

"Is it not your opinion too?" said the king.

"I think, Sire," he replied, "that M. Colbert has done what he had to do in an exceedingly orderly manner, and that he deserves in this respect all the praise your Majesty may bestow upon him."

The word "orderly" was a proper accompaniment for the word "clerk." Louis XIV. possessed that extreme sensitiveness of organization, that delicacy of perception, which pierced through and detected the regular order of feelings and sensations, before the actual sensations themselves; and he therefore comprehended that the clerk had,

in Fouquet's opinion, been too full of method and order in his arrangements, — in other words, that the magnificent *fêtes* of Fontainebleau might have been rendered more magnificent still. The king consequently felt that there was something in the amusements he had provided with which some person or other might be able to find fault; he experienced a little of the annoyance felt by one coming from the provinces to Paris, dressed out in the very best clothes which his wardrobe can furnish, who finds that the fashionably dressed man there looks at him either too much or not enough. This part of the conversation, which Fouquet had carried on with so much moderation yet with such extreme tact, inspired the king with still higher esteem for the character of the man and the capacity of the minister.

Fouquet took his leave at one o'clock in the morning, and the king went to bed a little uneasy and confused at the indirect lesson he had just received; and two good quarters of an hour were employed by him in going over again in his memory the embroideries, the tapestries, the *menus* of the banquets, the architecture of the triumphal arches, the arrangements for the illuminations and fireworks, all ordered by the "clerk Colbert." The result was that the king passed in review before him everything that had taken place during the last week, and decided that several faults could be found in his *fêtes*. But Fouquet by his politeness, his thoughtful consideration, and his generosity had injured Colbert more deeply than the latter by his artifice, his ill-will, and his persevering hatred had ever succeeded in injuring Fouquet.

CHAPTER LII.

FONTAINEBLEAU AT TWO O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING.

As we have seen, De Saint-Aignan had quitted the king's apartment at the very moment when the superintendent entered it. De Saint-Aignan was charged with a mission which required despatch; that is as much as saying that he was going to do his utmost to turn his time to good account. He whom we have introduced as the king's friend was indeed an uncommon personage. He was one of those valuable courtiers whose vigilance and acuteness of perception at this crisis threw all past and future favorites into the shade, counterbalancing by his close attention the servility of Dangeau, who was not the favorite but the toady of the king.

M. de Saint-Aignan began to consider what was to be done in the present position of affairs. He reflected that his first information ought to come from De Guiche. He therefore set out in search of him; but De Guiche, whom we saw disappear behind one of the wings of the château, and who seemed to have returned to his own apartments, had not entered the château. De Saint-Aignan therefore went in quest of him; and after having turned and twisted and searched in every direction, he perceived something like a human form leaning against a tree. This figure was as motionless as a statue, and seemed deeply engaged in looking at a window, although the curtains of this window were closely drawn. As this window happened to be Madame's, De Saint-Aignan con-

cluded that the form in question must be that of De Guiche. He advanced cautiously, and found that he was not mistaken. De Guiche had, after his conversation with Madame, carried away such a weight of happiness that all his strength of mind was hardly sufficient to enable him to support it. On his side, De Saint-Aignan knew that De Guiche had had something to do with La Vallière's introduction to Madame's household, for a courtier knows everything and forgets nothing; but he had never learned under what title or what conditions De Guiche had conferred his protection upon La Vallière. But as in asking a great many questions it is singular if a man does not learn something, De Saint-Aignan reckoned upon learning much or little, as it might be, if he were to question De Guiche with that extreme tact and at the same time with that persistence in attaining an object of which he was capable.

De Saint-Aignan's plan was the following: If the information obtained was satisfactory, he would inform the king with effusion that he had alighted upon a pearl, and would claim the privilege of setting that pearl in the royal crown; if the information were unsatisfactory, — which, after all, might be possible, — he would examine how far the king cared about La Vallière, and make use of his information in such a manner as to get rid of the girl altogether, and thereby obtain all the merit of her banishment with all those ladies of the court who might have any pretensions upon the king's heart, beginning with Madame and ending with the queen. In case the king should show himself obstinate in his fancy, then he would not produce the damaging information he had obtained, but would let La Vallière know that this damaging information was carefully preserved in a secret drawer of her confidant's memory. In this manner he

would be able to display his generosity before the poor girl's eyes, and so keep her in constant suspense between gratitude and apprehension, — to such an extent as to make her a friend at court, interested, as an accomplice, in making her accomplice's fortune while she was making her own. As for the day when the bomb-shell of the past should burst, — supposing there should ever be any occasion for its bursting, — De Saint Aignan promised himself that he would by that time have taken all possible precautions, and would pretend an entire ignorance of the matter to the king; while with regard to La Vallière, he would still even on that day have an opportunity of being considered the personification of generosity.

It was with such ideas as these, which the fire of covetousness had caused to dawn into being in half an hour, that De Saint-Aignan — the best son in the world, as La Fontaine would have said — set off with the well-defined intention of making De Guiche speak; in other words, to trouble him in his happiness, — a happiness of which De Saint-Aignan was quite ignorant. It was one o'clock in the morning when De Saint-Aignan perceived De Guiche standing motionless, leaning against the trunk of a tree with his eyes fastened upon that lighted window. One o'clock in the morning, — that is, the softest hour of night-time; that which painters crown with myrtles and budding poppies; the hour when eyes are heavy, hearts are throbbing, and heads feel dull and languid; an hour which casts upon the day which has passed away a look of regret, which addresses a loving greeting to the dawn of another. For De Guiche it was the dawn of unutterable happiness; he would have bestowed a treasure upon a beggar, had he stood before him, to secure him an uninterrupted indulgence in his

dreams. It was precisely at this hour that De Saint-Aignan, badly advised (selfishness always counsels badly), came and struck him on the shoulder at the very moment when he was murmuring a word, or rather a name.

"Ah," he cried loudly, "I was looking for you!"

"For me?" said De Guiche, starting.

"Yes; and I find you moon-struck. Is it likely, my dear count, that you have been attacked by the poetical malady, and are making verses?"

The young man forced a smile upon his lips, while a thousand very different feelings were muttering against De Saint-Aignan in the deep recesses of his heart. "Perhaps," he said; "but by what happy chance —"

"Ah! your remark shows that you did not hear what I said."

"How so?"

"Why, I began by telling you I was looking for you."

"You were looking for me!"

"Yes; and I find you now in the very act."

"Of doing what, I should like to know?"

"Of singing the praises of Phyllis."

"Well, I do not deny it," said De Guiche, laughing. "Yes, my dear count, I was celebrating Phyllis's praises."

"And you have acquired the right to do so."

"I?"

"You; no doubt of it, — you, the intrepid protector of every beautiful and clever woman."

"In the name of goodness, what story have you got hold of now?"

"Acknowledged truths, I am well aware. But stay a moment! I am in love."

"You?"

"Yes."

"So much the better, my dear count. Come and tell me all about it;" and De Guiche, afraid that De Saint-Aignan might perhaps presently observe that lighted window, took the count's arm and endeavored to lead him away.

"Oh!" said the latter, resisting, "do not take me towards those dark woods; it is too damp there. Let us stay in the moonlight, if you please;" and while he yielded to the pressure of De Guiche's arm, he tarried in the flower-garden adjoining the château.

"Well," said De Guiche, resigning himself, "lead me where you like, and ask me what you please."

"It is impossible to be more agreeable than you are;" and then, after a moment's silence, De Saint-Aignan continued, "My dear count, I wish you to tell me something about a certain person in whom you have interested yourself."

"And with whom you are in love?"

"I will neither admit nor deny it. You understand that a man does not very readily place his heart where there is no hope of return, and that it is most essential he should take measures of security in advance."

"You are right," said De Guiche, with a sigh; "a heart is a precious gift."

"Mine particularly is very tender, and in that light I present it to you."

"Oh, you are well known, Count! Well?"

"It is simply a question of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente."

"Why, my dear Saint-Aignan, you are losing your senses, I should think."

"Why so?"

"I have never shown or taken any interest in Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente."

"Bah!"

"Never."

"Was it not you who obtained admission for Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente into Madame's household?"

"Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente — and you ought to know it better than any one else, my dear count — is of a sufficiently good family to make her presence here desirable, and a greater reason therefore to render her admittance very easy."

"You are jesting."

"No, and upon my honor, I do not know what you mean."

"And you positively had nothing, then, to do with her admission?"

"No."

"You do not know her?"

"I saw her for the first time the day she was presented to Madame. Therefore, as I have never been her patron, as I do not know her, I am not able to give you the information you require;" and De Guiche made a movement as though to leave his questioner.

"Nay, nay, one moment, my dear count," said Saint Aignan; "you shall not escape me in this manner."

"I beg your pardon, but really it seems to me that it is now time to return to our apartments."

"And yet you were not going in when I — did not meet, but found you."

"Therefore, my dear count," said De Guiche, "as long as you have anything to say to me, I place myself entirely at your service."

"And you are quite right in doing so. What matters half an hour more or less? Your lace will be neither the more nor less rumpled. Will you swear that you have no

injurious communications to make to me about her, and that any injurious communications you might possibly have to make are not the cause of your silence?"

"Oh, I believe the poor child to be as pure as crystal!"

"You overwhelm me with joy. And yet I do not wish to have towards you the appearance of a man so badly informed as I seem. It is quite certain that you supplied the princess's household with the ladies of honor; nay, a song even has been written about it."

"You know, my dear friend, that songs are written about everything."

"Do you know it?"

"No; sing it to me and I shall make its acquaintance."

"I cannot tell you how it begins; I only remember how it ends."

"Very well; at all events, that is something."

"'Guiche is the furnisher
Of the maids of honor.'"

"The idea is weak, and the rhyming is poor."

"What can you expect, my dear fellow? It is not Racine's or Molière's, but La Feuillade's; and a great lord cannot rhyme like a beggarly poet."

"It is very unfortunate, though, that you remember only the termination."

"Stay, stay! I have just recollected the beginning of the second couplet, —

"'He has stocked the birdcage (*volière*),
Montalais and —'"

"*Pardieu!* 'and La Vallière'!" exclaimed De Guiche, impatiently, and completely ignorant, besides, of De Saint-Aignan's object.

"Yes, yes, that is it, — 'La Vallière.' You have hit upon the rhyme, my dear fellow."

"A grand discovery, indeed!"

"Montalais and La Vallière, — these, then, are the two young girls in whom you interested yourself," said De Saint-Aignan, laughing.

"And so Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente's name is not to be met with in the song?"

"No, indeed."

"And you are satisfied, then?"

"Perfectly; but I find Montalais there," said De Saint-Aignan, still laughing.

"Oh, you will find her everywhere; she is a most active young lady."

"You know her?"

"Indirectly. She was the *protégé* of a man named Malicorne, who is a *protégé* of Manicamp. Manicamp asked me to get the situation of maid of honor for Montalais in Madame's household, and a situation for Malicorne, as an officer in Monsieur's household. Well, I asked for the appointments, and you know very well that I have a weakness for that droll fellow Manicamp."

"And you obtained what you sought!"

"For Montalais, yes; for Malicorne, yes and no, — for as yet he is only tolerated there. Do you wish to know anything else?"

"The last word of the couplet still remains, — 'La Vallière,'" said De Saint-Aignan, resuming the smile which had so tormented De Guiche.

"Well," said the latter, "it is true that I obtained admission for her in Madame's household."

"Ah, ah!" said De Saint-Aignan.

"But," continued De Guiche, assuming the greatest coldness of manner, "you will oblige me, my dear count,

not to jest about that name. Mademoiselle la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière is a young lady perfectly well-conducted."

"Perfectly well-conducted?"

"Yes."

"Then you have not heard the last rumor?" exclaimed De Saint-Aignan.

"No; and you will do me a service, my dear count, in keeping this report to yourself and to those who circulate it."

"Ah! bah! you take the matter up very seriously."

"Yes; Mademoiselle de la Vallière is beloved by one of my best friends."

De Saint-Aignan started.

"Oh!" he said.

"Yes, Count," continued De Guiche; "and consequently you, the politest man in France, will understand that I cannot allow my friend to be placed in a ridiculous position."

"Oh, very well!" and De Saint-Aignan began to bite his nails, partially from vexation and partially from disappointed curiosity.

De Guiche made him a very profound bow.

"You send me away?" said De Saint-Aignan, who was dying to learn the name of the friend.

"I do not send you away, my dear fellow, — I am going to finish my lines to Phyllis."

"And those lines —"

"Are a quatrain. You understand, I suppose, that a quatrain is a serious affair?"

"Of course."

"And as of these four lines, of which it is naturally composed, I have yet three and a half to make, I need my undivided attention."

"I quite understand. Adieu, Count! By the by—"

"What?"

"Are you quick at making verses?"

"Wonderfully so."

"Will you quite have finished, the three lines and a half to-morrow morning?"

"I hope so."

"Adieu, then, until to-morrow."

"Till to-morrow, adieu!"

De Saint-Aignan was obliged to accept the notice to quit; he accordingly did so, and disappeared behind the hedge. Their conversation had led De Guiche and De Saint-Aignan a good distance from the château.

Every mathematician, every poet, and every dreamer has his means of diverting his attention. De Saint-Aignan, then, on leaving De Guiche, found himself at the extremity of the grove, — at the very spot where the outbuildings for the servants begin, and where behind thickets of acacias and chestnut-trees interlacing their branches, which were hidden by masses of clematis and young vines, the wall which separated the woods from the courtyard of these outbuildings was erected. De Saint-Aignan, left alone, took the path which led towards these buildings; De Guiche going off in the very opposite direction. The one proceeded towards the flower-garden, while the other bent his steps towards the walls. De Saint-Aignan walked on between rows of the mountain-ash, lilac, and hawthorn, which formed an almost impenetrable roof above his head; his feet were buried in the soft gravel and in the thick moss. He was deliberating over a means of taking his revenge, which it seemed difficult for him to carry out, and was nonplussed, as Tallemant des Réaux would have said, by not having learned more about La Vallière, notwithstanding the ingenious

tactics he had employed in order to acquire some information about her, when suddenly the sound of human voices attracted his attention. He heard whispers, the complaining tones of a woman's voice mingled with entreaties, smothered laughter, sighs, and half-stifled exclamations of surprise; but above them all, the woman's voice prevailed. De Saint-Aignan stopped to look about him; he perceived with the most intense surprise that the voices proceeded not from the ground but from the branches of the trees. As he glided along under the covered walk, he raised his head, and observed at the top of the wall a woman perched upon a ladder, in eager conversation with a man seated on a branch of a chestnut-tree, whose head alone could be seen, the rest of his body being concealed in the thick covert of the chestnut. The woman was on the near side of the wall, the man on the other side of it.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE LABYRINTH.

De Saint-Aignan, who had only been seeking for information, had met with an adventure. This was indeed a piece of good luck. Curious to learn why, and particularly about what, this man and woman were conversing at such an hour and in such a singular position, De Saint-Aignan made himself as small as he possibly could, and approached almost under the rounds of the ladder. Then taking measures to make himself as comfortable as possible, he leaned his back against a tree and listened, and heard the following conversation. The woman was the first to speak.

"Really, M. Manicamp," she said, in a voice which notwithstanding the reproaches she addressed to him preserved a marked tone of coquetry, "really, your indiscreetness is of a very dangerous character. We cannot talk long in this manner without being observed."

"That is very probable," said the man, in the calmest and coolest of tones.

"In that case, then, what would people say? Oh, if any one were to see me, I declare I should die from very shame!"

"Oh, that would be very silly, and I do not believe you capable of it."

"It might have been different if there had been anything between us; but to do an injury to myself gratui-

tously is really very foolish of me. So, adieu, M. Manicamp!"

"So far, so good; I know the man, and now let me see who the woman is," said De Saint-Aignan, watching the rounds of the ladder on which were standing two pretty little feet covered with sky-blue satin shoes and flesh-colored stockings.

"Nay, nay, for pity's sake, my dear Montalais," cried Manicamp, "deuce take it, do not go away! I have a great many things still to say to you, of the very greatest importance."

"Montalais," said De Saint-Aignan to himself, — "one of the three! Each of the three gossips had her adventure; only, I had thought that the hero of this one's adventure was M. Malicorne and not Manicamp."

At her companion's appeal Montalais stopped in the middle of her descent; and De Saint-Aignan could observe the unfortunate Manicamp climb up from one branch of the chestnut-tree to another, either to improve his situation or to overcome the fatigue consequent upon his cramped position.

"Now listen to me," said he; "you quite understand, I hope, that my intentions are perfectly innocent."

"Of course. But why did you write me that letter stimulating my gratitude towards you? Why did you ask me for an interview at such an hour and in such a place as this?"

"I stimulated your gratitude in reminding you that it was I who had been the means of your entering Madame's household. Because I was most anxiously desirous to obtain the interview which you have been kind enough to grant me, I employed the means which appeared to me the most certain to insure it. And my reason for soliciting it at such an hour and in such a locality was that the

hour seemed to me to be the most prudent and the locality the least open to observation. Moreover, I had occasion to speak to you upon certain subjects which require both prudence and solitude."

"M. Manicamp!"

"But everything perfectly honorable, I assure you."

"I think, M. Manicamp, that it would be more becoming in me to take my leave."

"Nay, listen to me, or I shall jump from my perch here to yours; and be careful how you set me at defiance, for just at this moment a branch of this chestnut-tree causes me a good deal of annoyance and may provoke me to extreme measures. Do not follow the example of this branch, then, but listen to me."

"I am listening, and I will agree to do so; but be brief, for if you have a branch which annoys you, I wish you to understand that a three-cornered round of the ladder is hurting the soles of my feet, and my shoes are being cut through."

"Please to give me your hand, Mademoiselle."

"Why?"

"Will you have the goodness to do so?"

"There is my hand, then; but what are you going to do?"

"To draw you towards me."

"What for? You do not wish me to join you in the tree, I hope?"

"No; but I wish you to sit down upon the wall. There, that will do; there is quite room enough, and I would give a great deal to be allowed to sit down beside you."

"No, no; you are very well where you are. We should be seen."

"Do you really think so?" asked Manicamp, in an insinuating voice.

"I am sure of it."

"Very well; I remain in my tree, then, although I cannot be worse placed."

"M. Manicamp, we are wandering away from the subject."

"You are right."

"You wrote me a letter?"

"I did."

"Why did you write?"

"Fancy that at two o'clock to-day De Guiche left."

"What then?"

"Seeing him set off, I followed him, as I usually do."

"Of course I see that, since you are here now."

"Don't be in a hurry! You are aware, I suppose, that poor De Guiche is up to his very neck in disgrace?"

"Alas! yes."

"It was the very height of imprudence on his part, then, to come to Fontainebleau to seek those who had at Paris sent him away into exile, and particularly those from whom he had been separated."

"M. Manicamp, you reason like Pythagoras of old."

"Moreover, De Guiche is as obstinate as a man in love can be, and he refused to listen to any of my remonstrances. I begged, I implored him, but he would not listen to anything. Oh, the deuce!"

"What's the matter?"

"I beg your pardon, Mademoiselle; but this confounded branch, about which I have already had the honor of speaking to you, has just torn a certain portion of my dress."

"It is quite dark," replied Montalais, laughing; "so pray continue, M. Manicamp."

"De Guiche set off on horseback as hard as he could, I following him, but at a slower pace. You quite under-

stand that to go and throw one's self into the water, for instance, with a friend with the same headlong speed that he himself uses, would be the act either of a fool or of a madman. I therefore allowed De Guiche to get in advance, and I proceeded on my way with a commendable slowness of pace, feeling quite sure that my unfortunate friend would not be received, or if he had been, that he would ride off again at the very first cross, disagreeable answer, and that I should see him returning much faster than he had gone, without having myself gone farther than Ris or Melun, — and that was a good distance, you will admit, for it is eleven leagues to get there and as many to return."

Montalais shrugged her shoulders.

"Laugh as much as you like, Mademoiselle; but if instead of being comfortably seated on the top of the wall, as you are, you were sitting on this branch, as if you were on horseback, you would, like Augustus, aspire to descend."

"Be patient, my dear M. Manicamp, a few minutes are soon passed; you were saying, then, that you had gone beyond Ris and Melun?"

"Yes, I went through Ris and Melun; and I continued to go on, more and more surprised that I did not see him returning; and here I am at last at Fontainebleau. I look for and inquire after De Guiche everywhere; but no one has seen him, no one in the town has spoken to him. He arrived riding at full gallop; he entered the château, where he has disappeared. I have been here at Fontainebleau since eight o'clock this evening inquiring for De Guiche in every direction, but no De Guiche can be found. I am dying from uneasiness. You understand that I have not been running my head into the lion's den in entering the château myself, as my

imprudent friend has done. I came at once to the outbuildings, and I succeeded in getting a letter conveyed to you; and now, Mademoiselle, for Heaven's sake, relieve me from my anxiety."

"There will be no difficulty in that, my dear M. Manicamp; your friend De Guiche has been admirably received."

"Bah!"

"The king gave him a warm reception."

"The king, who exiled him!"

"Madame smiled upon him, and Monsieur appears to like him better than ever."

"Ah!" said Manicamp, "that explains to me, then, why and how he has remained. And did he not say anything about me?"

"Not a word."

"That is very unkind. What is he doing now?"

"In all probability he is asleep, or if not asleep, he is dreaming."

"And what have they been doing all the evening?"

"Dancing."

"The famous ballet? How was De Guiche?"

"Superb."

"Dear fellow! And now, pray forgive me, Mademoiselle; but all that I now have to do is to pass from where I now am to your apartment."

"What do you mean?"

"I cannot suppose that the door of the château will be opened for me at this hour: and as for spending the night upon this branch, I possibly might not object to do so, but I declare the thing to be impossible for any other animal than a popinjay."

"But, M. Manicamp, I cannot introduce a man over the wall in that manner."

"Two, Mademoiselle," said a second voice, but in so timid a tone that it seemed as if its owner felt the utter impropriety of such a request.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Montalais, peering at the foot of the chestnut-tree, "who is that speaking to me?"

"I, Mademoiselle."

"Who are you?"

"Malicorne, your very humble servant;" and as he spoke, he raised himself from the ground to the lowest branches, and thence to the top of the wall.

"M. Malicorne! Gracious heavens! why, you are both mad!"

"How do you do, Mademoiselle?" inquired Malicorne, with great civility.

"I needed but this!" exclaimed Montalais, in despair.

"Oh, Mademoiselle," murmured Malicorne, "do not be so severe, I beseech you!"

"In fact, Mademoiselle," said Manicamp, "we are your friends, and you cannot possibly wish your friends to lose their lives; and to leave us to pass the night where we are is in fact condemning us both to death."

"Oh," said Montalais, "M. Malicorne is so robust that a night passed in the open air with the beautiful stars above him will not do him any harm, and it will be a just punishment for the trick he has played me"

"Be it so, then! Let Malicorne arrange matters with you in the best way he can; I pass over," said Manicamp; and bending down the famous branch against which he had directed such bitter complaints, he succeeded, with the assistance of his hands and feet, in seating himself side by side with Montalais, who tried to push him back, while he endeavored to maintain his position. This conflict, which lasted several seconds, had its pic-

turesque side, which M. de Saint-Aignan certainly found entertaining. But Manicamp won, and having taken possession of the ladder placed his foot on it, and then gallantly offered his hand to his fair antagonist. While this was going on, Malicorne had installed himself in the chestnut-tree, in the very place Manicamp had just left, determining within himself to succeed him in the one which he now occupied. Manicamp and Montalais descended a few rounds of the ladder, Manicamp insisting, and Montalais laughing and objecting.

Suddenly Malicorne's voice was heard in tones of entreaty: "I entreat you, Mademoiselle, not to leave me here. My position is very insecure, and I cannot, unaided, reach the other side of the wall without accident. It does not matter if Manicamp tears his clothes, for he can make use of M. de Guiche's wardrobe; but I shall not be able to use even those belonging to M. Manicamp, for they will be torn."

"My opinion," said Manicamp, without taking any notice of Malicorne's lamentations, "is that the best thing to be done is for me to go and look for De Guiche without delay; for by and by perhaps I may not be able to get to his apartments."

"That is my own opinion too," replied Montalais; "so go at once, M. Manicamp."

"A thousand thanks. Adieu, Mademoiselle," said Manicamp, jumping to the ground; "your kindness cannot possibly be exceeded."

"Do not mention it, M. Manicamp; I am now going to get rid of M. Malicorne." Malicorne sighed. "Go, go!" continued Montalais.

Manicamp went away a few paces, but returning to the foot of the ladder, said, "By the by, Mademoiselle, which is the way to M. de Guiche's?"

"Ah, nothing is easier! You go along by the hedge until you reach a place where the paths cross."

"Yes."

"You will see four paths."

"Exactly."

"One of which you will take."

"Which of them?"

"That to the right."

"To the right?"

"No, — to the left."

"The deuce!"

"No, no! wait a minute — "

"You do not seem to be quite sure. Think again, I beg you, Mademoiselle."

"You take the middle path."

"But there are four."

"So there are. All that I know is that one of the four paths leads straight to Madame's apartments; and with that one I am well acquainted."

"But M. de Guiche is not in Madame's apartments, I suppose?"

"No, indeed."

"Well, then, the path which leads to Madame's apartments is of no use to me, and I would willingly exchange it for that which leads to where M. de Guiche is lodging."

"Of course, and I know that as well; but as for indicating from where we are, it seems to be quite impossible."

"Well, then, Mademoiselle, let us suppose that I have succeeded in finding that fortunate path."

"In that case you are almost there; for you have nothing else to do but to cross the labyrinth."

"Nothing more than that? The deuce! so there is a labyrinth as well?"

"Yes, and complicated enough too; even in daylight one may sometimes be deceived. There are turnings and windings without end; in the first place, you must turn three times to the right, then twice to the left, then turn once — Stay! is it once or twice, though? At all events, when you get clear of the labyrinth you will see an avenue of sycamores; and this avenue leads straight to the pavilion in which M. de Guiche is lodging."

"Nothing could be more clearly indicated, Mademoiselle," said Manicamp; "and I have not the slightest doubt in the world that if I were to follow your directions I should lose my way immediately. I have therefore a slight service to ask of you."

"What may that be?"

"That you will offer me your arm and guide me yourself, like another — like another — I used to know mythology, Mademoiselle, but other important matters have made me forget it, pray, come with me, then?"

"And am I to be abandoned, then?" cried Malicorne.

"It is quite impossible, Monsieur," said Montalais to Manicamp; "I might be seen with you at such an hour, and then just think what would be said of me!"

"Your own conscience would acquit you, Mademoiselle," said Manicamp, sententiously.

"Impossible, Monsieur, impossible!"

"In that case let me assist Malicorne to get down; he is a very intelligent fellow, and possesses a very keen scent. He will guide me; and if we lose ourselves, both of us will be lost, and the one will save the other. If we are together, and should be met by any one, we shall look as if we had some matter of business in hand; while alone I should have the appearance either of a lover or of a robber. Come, Malicorne; here is the ladder."

"M. Malicorne," cried Montalais, "I forbid you to leave your tree, and that under pain of incurring my anger."

Malicorne had already stretched out one leg towards the top of the wall and sadly withdrawn it, when Manicamp said in a whisper, "Hush!"

"What 's the matter?" inquired Montalais.

"I hear footsteps."

"Good heavens!"

In fact, the fancied footsteps soon became a reality; the foliage was pushed aside, and De Saint-Aignan appeared with a smile on his lips and his hand stretched out towards them, taking every one by surprise in their particular position, — that is to say, Malicorne upon the tree with his head stretched out, Montalais upon the rounds of the ladder and clinging to it tightly, and Manicamp on the ground with his foot advanced ready to set off. "Ah, good-evening, Manicamp!" said the count. "I am glad to see you, my dear fellow; we missed you this evening, and a good many inquiries have been made about you. Mademoiselle de Montalais, your most obedient servant."

Montalais blushed. "Good heavens!" she exclaimed, hiding her face in both her hands.

"Mademoiselle," said De Saint-Aignan, "pray reassure yourself. I know how entirely innocent you are, and I shall give a good account of you. Manicamp, do you follow me. The hedge, the cross-paths, and labyrinth, — I am well acquainted with them all; I will be your Ariadne. There, now! your mythological name is found at last."

"Perfectly true, Count."

"And take M. Malicorne away with you at the same time, Count," said Montalais.

"No, indeed," said Malicorne. "M. Manicamp has

conversed with you as long as he liked, and now it is my turn, if you please, Mademoiselle. I, too, have a multitude of things to tell you about our future prospects."

"You hear," said the count, laughing; "stay with him, Mademoiselle! This is indeed a night for secrets;" and taking Manicamp's arm, the count led him rapidly away in the direction of the road which Montalais knew so well and indicated so badly. Montalais followed them with her eyes as long as she could perceive them.

CHAPTER LIV.

HOW MALICORNE HAD BEEN TURNED OUT OF THE HOTEL OF THE BEAU PAON.

WHILE Montalais was engaged in looking after the count and Manicamp, Malicorne had taken advantage of the young girl's attention being drawn away to render his position somewhat more tolerable; and when she turned round, she immediately noticed the change which had taken place in his position, — for he had seated himself, like a monkey, upon the wall, with his feet resting upon the top rounds of the ladder. The foliage of the wild vine and the honeysuckle curled round his head, making him look like a faun, while the twisted ivy branches represented tolerably well the cloven feet. As for Montalais, she required nothing to complete her resemblance to a dryad. "Well," she said, ascending another round of the ladder, "are you resolved to render me unhappy? Have you not persecuted me enough, tyrant that you are?"

"I a tyrant?" said Malicorne.

"Yes, you are always compromising me, M. Malicorne; you are a perfect monster of wickedness."

"I?"

"What have you to do with Fontainebleau? Is not Orléans your place of residence?"

"Do you ask me what I have to do here? I wanted to see you."

"Ah, great need of that!"

"Not so far as concerns yourself, perhaps, but most certainly so far as I am concerned. Mademoiselle, you know very well that I have left my home, and that for the future I have no other place of residence than that which you may happen to have. As you therefore are staying at Fontainebleau at the present moment, I have come to Fontainebleau."

Montalais shrugged her shoulders. "You wished to see me, did you not?" she said.

"Of course."

"Very well, you have seen me, you are satisfied; so now go away."

"Oh, no!" said Malicorne; "I came to talk with you as well as to see you."

"Very well, we will talk by and by and in another place than this."

"By and by! Heaven only knows if I shall meet you by and by in another place. We shall never find a more favorable one than this."

"But I cannot this evening; at this moment I cannot."

"Why not?"

"Because a thousand things have happened to-night."

"Well, then, my affair will make a thousand and one."

"No, no; Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente is waiting for me in our room to communicate something of the very greatest importance."

"How long has she been waiting?"

"For an hour at least."

"In that case," said Malicorne, tranquilly, "she will wait a few minutes longer."

"M. Malicorne," said Montalais, "you are forgetting yourself."

"That is to say that you are forgetting me, Mademoiselle, and that I am getting impatient at the part you

make me play here, *mordieu!* For the last week, Mademoiselle, I have been prowling about among you all, and you have not deigned once to notice my presence here."

"Have you been prowling about here for a week, M. Malicorne?"

"Like a wolf; sometimes I have been burned by the fireworks, which have singed two of my wigs; at others, I have been completely drenched in the osiers by the evening damps or the spray from the fountains, — always half famished, always fatigued to death, with the view of a wall always before me, and the prospect of having to scale it perhaps. Upon my word, Mademoiselle, this is not the sort of life for any one to lead who is neither a squirrel nor a salamander nor an otter, and since you drive your inhumanity so far as to wish to make me renounce my condition as a man, I proclaim it openly. A man I am, *mordieu!* and a man I will remain, subject to superior orders."

"Well, then, tell me, what do you wish, what do you require, what do you demand?" said Montalais, in a submissive tone.

"Do you mean to tell me that you did not know that I was at Fontainebleau?"

"I —"

"Be frank."

"I suspected so."

"Well, then, could you not have contrived during the last week to have seen me once a day at least?"

"I have always been prevented, M. Malicorne."

"Fiddlestick!"

"Ask my companions, if you do not believe me."

"I shall ask no one to explain matters which I know better than any one."

"Compose yourself, M. Malicorne; things will change."

"They must, indeed."

"You know that whether I see you or not, I am thinking of you," said Montalais, in a coaxing tone of voice.

"Oh, you are thinking of me, are you? Well, and is there anything new?"

"What about?"

"About my post in Monsieur's household."

"Ah, my dear M. Malicorne, no one has ventured lately to approach his royal Highness."

"Well, but now?"

"Now it is quite a different thing; since yesterday he has left off being jealous."

"Bah! and how has his jealousy subsided?"

"There has been a diversion."

"Tell me all about it."

"A report was spread that the king had fallen in love with some one else, and Monsieur was tranquillized immediately."

"And who spread the report?"

Montalais lowered her voice. "Between ourselves," she said, "I think that Madame and the king have an understanding about it."

"Ah!" said Malicorne; "that was the only way to manage it. But what about poor M. de Guiche?"

"Oh, as for him, he is completely turned off!"

"Have they been writing to each other?"

"No, certainly not; I have not seen a pen in either of their hands for the last week."

"On what terms are you with Madame?"

"The very best."

"And with the king?"

"The king always smiles at me whenever I pass him.'

"Good. Now tell me whom have the two lovers selected to serve for their screen?"

"La Vallière."

"Oh, oh, poor girl! We must prevent that, my dear."

"Why?"

"Because, if M. Raoul de Bragelonne were to suspect it, he would either kill her or kill himself."

"Raoul, poor fellow! do you think so?"

"Women pretend to have a knowledge of the state of people's affections," said Malicorne, "and they do not even know how to read the thoughts of their own minds. Well, I can tell you that M. de Bragelonne loves La Vallière to such a degree that if she pretended to deceive him, he would, I repeat, either kill himself or kill her."

"But the king is there to defend her," said Montalais.

"The king!" exclaimed Malicorne; "Raoul would kill the king as he would a Dutch dragoon."

"Good heavens!" said Montalais; "you are mad, M. Malicorne."

"Not in the least. Everything I have told you is, on the contrary, perfectly serious, my dear; and for my own part I know one thing."

"What is that?"

"That I shall quietly tell Raoul of the trick."

"Hush, you wretch!" said Montalais, ascending another round of the ladder, so as to approach Malicorne more closely; "do not open your lips to poor Bragelonne!"

"Why not?"

"Because as yet you know nothing at all."

"What is the matter, then?"

"Why, this evening — But no one is listening, I hope?"

"No."

"This evening, then, beneath the royal oak La Vallière said aloud, and innocently enough, these words, 'I cannot conceive that when one has seen the king, one can ever love another man.'"

Malicorne almost bounced off the wall. "Unhappy girl! did she really say that?"

"Word for word."

"And she thinks so?"

"La Vallière always thinks what she says."

"That positively cries aloud for vengeance. Why, women are serpents!" said Malicorne.

"Compose yourself, my dear Malicorne, compose yourself."

"No, no; let us strike at the roots of the evil, on the contrary. Let us warn Raoul; it is time."

"Blunderer! on the contrary, it is too late," replied Montalais.

"How so?"

"La Vallière's remark, which was intended for the king, reached its destination."

"The king knows it, then? The king was told of it, I suppose?"

"The king heard it."

"*Ohimé!* as the cardinal used to say."

"The king was in the thicket close to the royal oak."

"It follows, then," said Malicorne, "that for the future the plan which the king and Madame have arranged will go as easily as if it were on wheels, and will pass over poor Bragelonne's body."

"Precisely so."

"It is terrible!"

"So it is."

"Upon my word," said Malicorne, after a moment's silence devoted to meditation, "do not let us interpose our poor selves between a large oak-tree and a great king, for we should certainly be ground to pieces."

"The very thing I was going to say to you."

"Let us think of ourselves, then."

"My own idea."

"Open your beautiful eyes, then."

"And you your large ears.'

"Approach your little mouth for a good big kiss."

"Here," said Montalais, who paid the debt immedi ately in ringing coin.

"Now let us consider. First, we have M. de Guiche, who is in love with Madame; then La Vallière, who is in love with the king; next, the king, who is in love both with Madame and La Vallière; lastly, Monsieur, who loves no one but himself Among all these loves a noodle would make his fortune; a greater reason, therefore, for sensible people like ourselves to do so."

"There you are with your dreams again!"

"Nay, rather with my realities. Let yourself be led by me, darling. You have not been very badly off hitherto, have you?"

"No."

"Well, the future will agree with the past. Only, since all here think of themselves before anything else, let us do so too."

"Perfectly right."

"But of ourselves only."

"Be it so."

"An offensive and defensive alliance."

"I am ready to swear it."

"Put out your hand, then, and say, 'All for Malicorne.'"

"All for Malicorne."

"And I 'All for Montalais,'" responded Malicorne, stretching out his hand in his turn.

"And now what is to be done!"

"Keep your eyes and ears constantly open; collect every means of attack which may be serviceable against

others; never let anything lie about which can be used against ourselves."

"Agreed."

"Decided."

"Sworn to; and now that the agreement is entered into, good-by."

"What do you mean by 'good-by'?"

"Of course you can now return to your inn."

"To my inn?"

"Yes; are you not lodging at the sign of the Beau Paon?"

"Montalais, Montalais! you now see that you were aware of my being at Fontainebleau."

"Well, and what does that prove except that I occupied myself about you more than you deserve, ingrate?"

"Hum!"

"Go back, then, to the Beau Paon."

"That is now quite out of the question."

"Have you not a room there?"

"I had, but I have it no longer."

"You have it no longer? and who has taken it from you?"

"I will tell you. Some little time ago I was returning there, after I had been running about after you; and having reached my hotel quite out of breath, I perceived a litter, upon which four peasants were carrying a sick monk."

"A monk?"

"Yes, an old gray-bearded Franciscan. As I was looking at this sick monk, they entered the hotel; and as they were carrying him up the staircase, I followed; and as I reached the top of the staircase, I observed that they took him into my room."

"Into your room?"

"Yes, into my own apartment. Supposing it to be a mistake, I summoned the landlord, who says that the room which had been let to me for the past eight days was let to the Franciscan for the ninth."

"Oh! oh!"

"That was exactly what I said; nay, I did even more, for I was inclined to get out of temper. I went upstairs again; I spoke to the Franciscan himself, and wished to prove to him the impropriety of his step, when this monk, dying though he seemed to be, raised himself upon his arm, fixed a pair of blazing eyes upon me, and in a voice which was admirably suited to command a charge of cavalry, said, 'Turn this fellow out of doors!' which order was immediately executed by the landlord and the four porters, who made me descend the staircase somewhat faster than was agreeable. This is how it happens, dearest, that I have no lodging."

"Who can this Franciscan be?" said Montalais. "Is he a general?"

"Precisely; it seems to me that that is the title which one of the porters gave him as he spoke to him in a low tone."

"So that —" said Montalais.

"So that I have no room, no hotel, no lodging; and I am as determined as my friend Manicamp was just now, not to pass the night in the open air."

"What is to be done, then?" said Montalais.

"Nothing easier," said a third voice, whereupon Montalais and Malicorne uttered a simultaneous cry, and De Saint-Aignan appeared. "Dear M. Malicorne," said De Saint-Aignan, "a very lucky accident has brought me back to extricate you from your embarrassment. Come, I can offer you a room in my own apartments, of which I can assure you no Franciscan will

deprive you. As for you, my dear young lady, be easy! I already knew Mademoiselle de la Vallière's secret and that of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente; your own you have just been kind enough to confide to me, for which I thank you. I can keep three quite as well as one only." Malicorne and Montalais looked at each other, like two children detected in a theft; but as Malicorne saw a great advantage in the proposition which had been made to him, he gave Montalais a sign of resignation, which she returned. Malicorne then descended the ladder, round by round, reflecting at every step upon the means of obtaining piecemeal from M. de Saint-Aignan all he might possibly know about the famous secret. Montalais had already darted away as fleet as a deer, and neither cross-road nor labyrinth was able to mislead her. As for De Saint-Aignan, he carried off Malicorne with him to his apartments, showing him a thousand attentions, enchanted to have close at hand the very two men who, supposing that De Guiche were to remain silent, could give him the best information about the maids of honor.

CHAPTER LV

WHAT ACTUALLY DID OCCUR AT THE INN CALLED THE BEAU PAON.

In the first place, let us supply our readers with a few details about the inn called the Beau Paon; then we will pass to the description of the travellers who were residing there. The inn of the Beau Paon, like every inn, owed its name to its sign; and this represented a peacock spreading out its tail. But in imitation of some painters who had bestowed the face of a handsome young man upon the serpent which tempted Eve, the painter of this sign had conferred upon the "beautiful peacock" the features of a woman. This inn — a living epigram against that half of the human race which renders existence delightful, as M. Legouvé says — was situated at Fontainebleau, in the first turning on the left-hand side, which divides on the road from Paris that large artery which constitutes in itself alone the entire town of Fontainebleau. The side street in question was then known as the Rue de Lyon, doubtless because, geographically, it advanced in the direction of the second capital of the kingdom.

On the street itself were two houses occupied by tradespeople, the houses being separated by two large gardens bordered with hedges. Apparently, however, there were three houses in the street. Let us explain how, notwithstanding appearances, there were only two.

The inn of the Beau Paon had its principal front towards the main street; but upon the Rue de Lyon

there were two ranges of buildings divided by court-yards, which comprised sets of apartments for the reception of all classes of travellers, whether on foot or on horseback, or even with their own carriages; and in which could be supplied, not only board and lodging, but also accommodation for exercise and solitude for the wealthiest courtiers, whenever after having received some check at the court they wished to shut themselves up with their own society, either to swallow an affront or to brood over their revenge. From the windows of this back part of the building the travellers could perceive, in the first place, the street with the grass growing between the stones, which were being gradually loosened by it; next, the beautiful hedges of elder and thorn, which embraced, as though within two green and flowering arms, the citizens' houses of which we have spoken; and then, in the spaces between those houses, forming the ground-work of the picture, and appearing like an almost impassable barrier, a line of thick trees, the advanced sentinels of the vast forest which extends itself in front of Fontainebleau. It was therefore easy, provided one secured an apartment at the angle of the building, to obtain by the main street from Paris a view of the passers-by and the festivities as well as to hear them, and by the Rue de Lyon to look upon and to enjoy the calm of the country; and this without reckoning that in cases of urgent necessity, at the very moment when people might be knocking at the principal door in the Rue de Paris, one could make one's escape by the little door in the Rue de Lyon, and creeping along the gardens of the private houses attain the outskirts of the forest.

Malicorne, who it will be remembered was the first to bring to our notice this inn, in deploring his being turned out of it, having been absorbed in his own affairs, was far

from having told Montalais all that could be said about this curious inn; and we will try to repair Malicorne's grievous omission. He had not thought to tell, for instance, in what way he had gained admission into this inn; and moreover, with the exception of the few words he had said about the Franciscan friar, he had not given any particulars about the travellers who were staying there. The manner in which they had arrived, the manner in which they lived, the difficulty which existed for every one but certain privileged travellers in entering the hotel without a password and in living there without certain preparatory precautions, must have struck Malicorne, and we will venture to say really did so. But Malicorne, as we have already said, had some personal matters of his own to occupy his attention, which prevented his paying much attention to others. In fact, all the apartments of the hotel were engaged and retained by certain strangers, who never went out, who were incommunicative in their address, whose countenances were full of thoughtful occupation, and not one of whom was known to Malicorne. Every one of these travellers had arrived at the hotel since his own arrival there. Each man had gained entrance by giving a kind of password, which had at first attracted Malicorne's attention; but having inquired in an indirect manner about it, he had been informed that the host had given as a reason for this extreme vigilance, that, as the town was so full of wealthy noblemen, it must also be as full of clever and zealous pickpockets. The reputation of an honest inn like that of the Beau Paon was concerned in not allowing its visitors to be robbed. It occasionally happened, also, that Malicorne asked himself, as he thought matters carefully over in his mind and reflected upon his own position in the inn, how it was that they had

allowed him to become an inmate of the hotel, while he had observed since his residence there admission refused to so many. He asked himself, too, how it was that when Manicamp, who in his opinion must be a man to be looked upon with veneration by everybody, wished to bait his horse at the Beau Paon, on arriving there both horse and rider had been turned away with a *nescio vos* of the most positive character. All this for Malicorne, whose mind was fully occupied by his own love-affair and his personal ambition, was a problem he had not applied himself to solve. Had he wished to do so, we should hardly venture to say, notwithstanding the intelligence we have attributed to him, that he would have succeeded.

A few words will prove to the reader that nothing less than Œdipus in person could have solved the enigma in question. During the week seven travellers had taken up their abode in the inn, all of them having arrived there the day after the fortunate day on which Malicorne had fixed his choice on the Beau Paon. These seven persons, accompanied by a suitable retinue, were the following:—

First of all, a brigadier in the German army, his secretary, physician, three servants, and seven horses. The brigadier's name was the Comte von Wostpur.

A Spanish cardinal, with two nephews, two secretaries, an officer of his household, and twelve horses. The cardinal's name was Monseigneur Herrebia.

A rich merchant of Bremen, with his manservant and his horses. This merchant's name was Meinheer Bonstett.

A Venetian senator, with his wife and daughter, both extremely beautiful. The senator's name was Signor Marini.

A Scotch laird, with seven Highlanders of his clan, all on foot. The laird's name was MacCumnor.

An Austrian from Vienna, without title or coat-of-arms, who had arrived in a carriage, — a good deal of the priest, and something of the soldier. He was called "the Councillor."

And finally, a Flemish lady, with a manservant, a lady's-maid, and a female companion, a large retinue, great display, and immense horses. She was called "the Flemish lady."

All these travellers had arrived on the same day, we have said; and yet their arrival had occasioned no confusion in the inn, no stoppage in the street. Their apartments had been fixed upon beforehand, by the order of their couriers or their secretaries, who had arrived the previous evening or the same morning. Malicorne, who had arrived the previous day, riding an ill-conditioned horse, with a slender valise, had announced himself at the hotel of the Beau Paon as the friend of a nobleman desirous of witnessing the festivities, and who would himself arrive almost immediately. The landlord, on hearing these words, had smiled as if he were perfectly well acquainted either with Malicorne or with his friend the nobleman, and had said to him, "Since you are the first arrival, Monsieur, choose what apartment you please." This was said with that obsequiousness of manners, so full of meaning with landlords, which means, "Make yourself perfectly easy, Monsieur; we know with whom we have to do, and you will be treated accordingly." These words, with their accompanying gesture, Malicorne had thought very friendly, but rather obscure. However, as he did not wish to be very extravagant in his expenses, and as he thought that if he were to ask for a small apartment he would doubtless have been refused on ac-

count of his want of consequence, he hastened to close at once with the innkeeper's remark, and deceive him with a cunning equal to his own. So, smiling like a man for whom whatever might be done was but simply his due, he said, "My dear host, I shall take the best and the gayest room in the house."

"With a stable?"

"Yes, with a stable."

"And when will you take it?"

"Immediately, if it be possible."

"Quite so."

"But," Malicorne hastened to add, "I shall leave the large room unoccupied for the present."

"Very good!" said the landlord, with an air of much intelligence.

"Certain reasons, which you will understand by and by, oblige me to take, at my own cost, only this small room"

"Yes, yes," said the host.

"When my friend arrives, he will occupy the large apartment; and as a matter of course, as this large apartment will be his own affair, he will settle for it himself."

"Certainly," said the landlord, "certainly; it was so understood."

"It was so understood?"

"Word for word."

"It is extraordinary," murmured Malicorne. "You quite understand, then?"

"Yes."

"There is nothing more to be said. Since, then, you understand — for you do clearly understand, do you not? — "

"Perfectly."

"Very well, you may show me to my room."

The landlord, cap in hand, preceded Malicorne, who installed himself in his room, and became more and more surprised to observe that the landlord at every ascent or descent looked and winked at him in a manner which indicated the best possible intelligence between them. "There is some mistake here," said Malicorne to himself; "but until it is cleared up, I shall take the advantage of it, which is the best thing I can possibly do;" and he darted out of his room like a hunting-dog following up a scent, in search of all the news and curiosities of the court, getting himself burned in one place and drowned in another, as he had told Mademoiselle de Montalais. The day after he had been installed in his room he had noticed the seven travellers arrive one after the other, filling the whole hotel. At the sight of all those people, of all those carriages, of all that retinue, Malicorne rubbed his hands delightedly, thinking that one day later he should not have found a bed to lie upon after his return from his exploring expeditions. When all the travellers were lodged, the landlord entered Malicorne's room, and with his accustomed courteousness said to him, "You are aware, my dear monsieur, that the large room in the third detached building is still reserved for you?"

"Of course I am aware of it."

"I am really making you a present of it."

"Thank you."

"So that when your friend comes —"

"Well!"

"He will be satisfied with me, I hope; or if he be not, he will be very difficult to please."

"Excuse me, but will you allow me to say a few words about my friend?"

"Of course, for you have a perfect right to do so."

"He intended to come, as you know."

"And he does so still."

"He may possibly have changed his intention."

"No."

"You are quite sure, then?"

"Quite sure."

"But in case you should have some doubt."

"Well!"

"I can only say that I do not positively assure you that he will come."

"Yet he told you —"

"He certainly did tell me. But you know that 'Man proposes but God disposes,' *verba volant, scripta manent.*"

"Which is as much as to say —"

"That what is spoken flies away, and what is written remains; and as he did not write to me, but contented himself by saying to me, 'I will authorize you, yet without specially inviting you,' you must feel that it places me in a very embarrassing position."

"What do you authorize me to do, then?"

"Why, to let your rooms if you find a good tenant for them."

"I?"

"Yes, you."

"Never will I do such a thing, Monsieur! If he has not written to you, he has written to me."

"Ah! what does he say? Let us see if his letter agrees with his words."

"These are almost his very words:—

"'To the Landlord of the Beau Paon Hotel, — You will have been informed of the meeting arranged to take place in your hotel between some persons of importance; I shall be one of those who will assemble at Fontainebleau. Keep for

me, then, a small room for a friend who will arrive either before or after me—'

And you are the friend, I suppose," said the landlord, interrupting his reading of the letter. Malicorne bowed modestly. The landlord resumed:—

"'And a large apartment for myself. The large apartment is my own affair; but I wish the price of the smaller room to be moderate, as it is destined for a fellow who is deucedly poor.'

It is still you of whom he is speaking, is it not?" said the host.

"Oh, certainly!" said Malicorne.

"Then we are agreed; your friend will settle for his apartment, and you for your own."

"May I be broken alive upon the wheel," said Malicorne to himself, "if I understand anything at all about it!" And then he said aloud, "Well, then, are you satisfied with the name?"

"With what name?"

"With the name at the end of the letter. Does it give you the guarantee you require?"

"I was going to ask you his name," said the host.

"What! was not the letter signed?"

"No," said the host, opening his eyes very wide, full of mystery and curiosity.

"In that case," replied Malicorne, imitating his gesture and his mysterious look,—"if he has not given you his name, you understand, he must have his reasons for it."

"Oh, of course!"

"And therefore that I, his friend, his confidant, must not betray his incognito."

"You are perfectly right, Monsieur," replied the landlord, "and therefore I do not insist upon it."

"I appreciate your delicacy. As for myself, as my friend told you, my room is a separate affair; so let us come to terms about it. Short accounts make good friends, you know. How much is it?"

"There is no hurry."

"Never mind, — let us reckon it up, all the same: room, my own board, a place in the stable for my horse, and his feed. How much per day?"

"Four livres, Monsieur."

"Which will make twelve livres for the three days I have been here?"

"Twelve livres, — yes, Monsieur."

"Here are your twelve livres, then."

"But why settle now, Monsieur?"

"Because," said Malicorne, lowering his voice and resorting to his former air of mystery, seeing that mystery helped him on, — "because if I had to set off suddenly, to decamp at any moment, my account would be already settled."

"You are right, Monsieur."

"I may consider myself at home, then?"

"Perfectly."

"So far, so good. Adieu!" and the landlord withdrew. Malicorne, left alone, reasoned with himself in the following manner: "No one but M. de Guiche or Manicamp could have written to mine host, — M. de Guiche, because he wishes to secure a lodging for himself beyond the precincts of the court, in the event of his success or failure, as the case may be; Manicamp, because M. de Guiche may have intrusted him with his commission. And M. de Guiche or Manicamp will have argued in this manner: the large apartment to receive in a befitting manner a lady very thickly veiled, affording to the lady in question a second means of exit, —

into a street somewhat deserted and closely adjoining the forest; the smaller room either to shelter Manicamp for a time, who is M. de Guiche's confidant and will be the vigilant keeper of the door, or for M. de Guiche himself, acting for greater safety the part of master and that of confidant at the same time. Yet," he continued, "how about this meeting which is to take place, and which indeed has actually taken place, in this hotel? No doubt they are persons who are going to be presented to the king. And the 'poor devil' for whom the smaller room is destined is a trick, in order the better to conceal De Guiche or Manicamp. If this be the case, — as very likely it is, — there is only half the mischief done; for there is simply the length of one's purse-strings between Manicamp and Malicorne."

After he had thus reasoned the matter out, Malicorne had slept soundly, leaving the seven strangers to occupy, and to survey in every sense of the word, their several lodgings in the hotel. Whenever there was nothing at court to disquiet him, when he was weary of excursions and investigations, and of writing letters which he could never find an opportunity of delivering according to their address, he then returned home to his comfortable little room, and leaning upon the balcony, which was filled with nasturtiums and white pinks, Malicorne began to think over these strange travellers, for whom Fontainebleau seemed to possess no attractions in its illuminations or amusements or *fêtes*. Things went on in this manner until the seventh day, — a day of which we have given such full details, with its night also, in the preceding chapters. On that night Malicorne was enjoying the fresh air, seated at his window, towards one o'clock in the morning, when Manicamp appeared on horseback with a thoughtful and listless air.

"Good!" said Malicorne to himself, recognizing him at the first glance; "there 's my friend who has come to take possession of his apartment, — that is to say, of my room;" and he called to Manicamp, who looked up and immediately recognized Malicorne.

"Ah, by Jove!" said the former, his countenance clearing up; "glad to see you, Malicorne! I have been wandering about Fontainebleau, looking for three things I cannot find, — De Guiche, a room, and a stable."

"Of M. de Guiche I cannot give you either good or bad news, for I have not seen him; but so far as concerns your room and a stable, that 's another matter, for they have been retained here for you."

"Retained, — and by whom?"

"By yourself, I suppose."

"By me?"

"Do you mean to say that you have not engaged lodgings here?"

"By no means!" said Manicamp.

At this moment the landlord appeared in the doorway.

"I require a room," said Manicamp.

"Have you engaged one, Monsieur?"

"No."

"Then I have no rooms to let."

"In that case I have engaged a room," said Manicamp.

"A room simply, or lodgings?"

"Anything you please."

"By letter?" inquired the landlord.

Malicorne nodded affirmatively to Manicamp.

"Of course by letter," said Manicamp. "Did you not receive a letter from me?"

"What was the date of the letter?" inquired the host, in whom Manicamp's hesitation had aroused suspicion,

Manicamp scratched his ear, and looked up at Malicorne's window; but Malicorne had left his window and was coming down the stairs to his friend's assistance. At the very same moment a traveller wrapped up in a long Spanish cloak appeared at the porch, near enough to hear the conversation.

"I ask you what was the date of the letter you wrote to me to retain apartments here?" repeated the landlord, again pressing his question.

"Last Wednesday was the date." said the mysterious stranger, in a soft and polished tone of voice, touching the landlord on the shoulder.

Manicamp drew back, and it was now Malicorne's turn, who appeared on the threshold, to scratch his ear.

The landlord saluted the new arrival as a man who recognizes his true guest. "Monsieur," he said to him with civility, "your apartment is ready for you, and the stables too; only —" He looked round him, and inquired, "Your horses?"

"My horses may or may not arrive. That, however, matters but little to you, provided you are paid for what has been engaged."

The landlord bowed still lower.

"You have," continued the unknown traveller, "kept for me, besides, the small room for which I asked you."

"Oh!" said Malicorne, endeavoring to hide himself.

"Monsieur, your friend has occupied it during the last week," said the landlord, pointing to Malicorne, who was trying to make himself as small as possible.

The traveller, drawing his cloak round him so as to cover the lower part of his face, cast a rapid glance at Malicorne, and said, "This gentleman is no friend of mine."

The landlord almost started off his feet.

"I am not acquainted with this gentleman," continued the traveller.

"What!" exclaimed the host, turning to Malicorne, "are you not this gentleman's friend, then?"

"What does it matter whether I am or not, provided you are paid?" said Malicorne, parodying the stranger's remark in a very majestic manner.

"It matters so far as this," said the landlord, who began to perceive that one person had been taken for another, "that I beg you, Monsieur, to leave the rooms, which had been engaged beforehand, and by some other person than you."

"Still," said Malicorne, "this gentleman cannot require at the same time a room on the first floor and an apartment on the second. If this gentleman will take the room, I will take the apartment; if he prefers the apartment, I will keep the room."

"I am exceedingly distressed, Monsieur," said the traveller, in his soft voice; "but I need both the room and the apartment."

"At least, tell me for whom?" inquired Malicorne.

"The apartment I require for myself."

"Very well; but the room?"

"Look!" said the traveller, pointing towards a sort of procession which was approaching.

Malicorne looked in the direction indicated, and observed, borne upon a litter, the arrival of the Franciscan, whose installation in his own room he had, with a few details of his own, related to Montalais, and whom he had so uselessly endeavored to convert to humbler views. The result of the arrival of the unknown traveller and of the sick Franciscan was Malicorne's expulsion, without any consideration for his feelings, from the inn of the Beau Paon by the landlord and the peasants who had

carried the Franciscan. The details of what followed this expulsion have already been given, — of Manicamp's conversation with Montalais; how Manicamp, with greater cleverness than Malicorne had shown, had succeeded in obtaining news of De Guiche; of the subsequent conversation of Montalais with Malicorne; and, finally, of the lodgings with which the Comte de Saint-Aignan had furnished Manicamp and Malicorne. It remains for us to inform our readers who were the traveller with the cloak — the principal tenant of the double apartment of which Malicorne had only occupied a portion — and the Franciscan, quite as mysterious a personage, whose arrival, together with that of the stranger with the cloak, had been unfortunate enough to upset the two friends' plans.

CHAPTER LVI.

A JESUIT OF THE ELEVENTH YEAR.

In the first place, in order not to weary the reader's patience, we will hasten to answer the first question. The traveller with the cloak held over his face was Aramis, who after he had left Fouquet and had taken from a portmanteau which his servant had opened a cavalier's complete costume, had quitted the château, and had gone to the hotel of the Beau Paon, where by letter, seven or eight days previous, he had, as the landlord had stated, directed a room and an apartment to be retained for him.

Immediately after Malicorne and Manicamp had been turned out, Aramis approached the Franciscan, and asked him whether he would prefer the apartment or the room. The Franciscan inquired where they were both situated. He was told that the room was on the first floor, and the apartment on the second.

"The room, then," he said.

Aramis did not contradict him, but with great submissiveness said to the landlord, "The room;" and bowing with respect he withdrew into the apartment, and the Franciscan was accordingly carried at once into the room. Now, is it not extraordinary that this respect should be shown by a prelate of the church for a simple monk, — for one, too, belonging to a mendicant order, — to whom was thus given up, without a request for it even, a room which so many travellers were desirous of obtaining? How, too, was to be explained this unexpected arrival of

Aramis at the hotel of the Beau Paon, when he had entered the château with M. Fouquet, and could have remained at the château with M. Fouquet if he had liked?

The Franciscan supported his removal up the staircase without uttering a complaint, although it was evident that he suffered very much, and that every time the litter was knocked against the wall or against the railing of the staircase he experienced a terrible shock throughout his frame; and finally, when he had arrived in the room, he said to those who carried him, "Help me to place myself in that arm-chair." The bearers of the litter placed it on the ground, and lifting the sick man as gently as possible, carried him to the chair he had indicated, which was placed at the head of the bed. "Now," he added, with a marked benignity of gesture and tone, "desire the landlord to come up."

The men obeyed, and five minutes afterwards the landlord appeared at the door.

"My friend," said the Franciscan to him, "be kind enough to send these good fellows away; they are vassals of the Vicomte de Melun. They found me when, overcome by the heat, I had fainted on the road, and without thinking whether they would be paid for their trouble, they wished to carry me to their own homes. But I know at what cost to themselves is the hospitality which the poor extend to a sick man, and I preferred this hotel, where moreover I was expected."

The landlord looked at the Franciscan in amazement; but the latter with his thumb made the sign of the cross in a peculiar manner upon his breast. The host replied by making a similar sign on his left shoulder. "Yes, indeed," he said, "we did expect you, my father, but we hoped that you would arrive in a better state of health." As the peasants were looking with astonishment at the

innkeeper, usually so supercilious, and saw how respectful he had become all of a sudden in the presence of a poor monk, the Franciscan drew from a deep pocket two or three pieces of gold, which he held out.

"My friends," said he, "here is something to repay you for the care you have taken of me. So make yourselves perfectly easy, and do not be afraid of leaving me here. The order to which I belong, and for which I am travelling, does not wish me to beg, and as the attention you have shown me deserves to be rewarded, take these two louis and depart in peace."

The peasants did not dare to take them. The landlord took the two louis from the monk's hand, and placed them in that of one of the peasants, all four of whom withdrew, opening their eyes wider than ever. The door was then closed, and while the innkeeper stood respectfully near it, the Franciscan collected himself for a moment. He then passed across his sallow face a hand which seemed dried up by fever, and rubbed his nervous and trembling fingers across his grizzly beard. His large eyes, hollowed by sickness and anxiety, seemed to pursue in the vague distance a mournful and fixed idea.

"What physicians have you at Fontainebleau?" the Franciscan inquired, after a long pause.

"We have three, my father."

"What are their names?"

"Luiniguet, first."

"The next one?"

"A brother of the Carmelite order, named Brother Hubert."

"The next?"

"A secular member, named Grisart."

"Ah! Grisart?" murmured the monk "Send for M. Grisart immediately."

The landlord moved in prompt obedience to the direction.

"Tell me, what priests are there near here?"

"What priests?"

"Yes, belonging to what orders?"

"There are Jesuits, Augustines, and Cordeliers; but the Jesuits are the nearest. Shall I send for a Jesuit confessor?"

"Yes, immediately."

The landlord went out.

It will be imagined that at the sign of the cross which they had exchanged the landlord and the invalid monk had recognized each other as two affiliated members of the formidable Society of Jesus. Left to himself, the Franciscan drew from his pocket a bundle of papers, some of which he read over with the most careful attention. The violence of his disorder, however, overcame his courage; his eyes rolled in their sockets, a cold sweat poured down his face, and he nearly fainted, and lay with his head thrown back and his arms hanging down on both sides of his chair. For more than five minutes he remained without any movement, when the landlord returned, bringing with him the physician, whom he had hardly allowed time to dress himself. The noise which they made in entering the room, the current of air which the opening of the door had occasioned, restored the sick man to his senses. He hurriedly seized hold of his scattered papers, and with his long and meagre hand concealed them under the cushions of the chair. The landlord went out of the room, leaving patient and physician together.

"Come here, M. Grisart," said the Franciscan to the doctor; "approach closer, for there is no time to be lost. Examine me, consider, and pronounce your sentence."

"The landlord," replied the physician, "told me that I had the honor of attending an affiliated brother."

"Yes," replied the Franciscan, "it is so. Tell me the truth, then. I feel very ill, and think that I am going to die."

The physician took the monk's hand and felt his pulse. "Oh!" he said, "a dangerous fever."

"What do you call a dangerous fever?" inquired the patient, with an imperious look.

"To an affiliated member of the first or second year," replied the physician, looking inquiringly at the monk, "I should say — a fever that may be cured."

"But to me?" said the Franciscan.

The physician hesitated.

"Look at my gray hair, and my forehead, full of anxious thought," he continued; "look at the lines in my face, by which I reckon up the trials I have undergone. I am a Jesuit of the eleventh year, M. Grisart."

The physician started; for, in fact, a Jesuit of the eleventh year was one of those men who had been initiated in all the secrets of the order, — one of those for whom the science has no more secrets, the society no further barriers to present, temporal obedience no more trammels.

"In that case," said Grisart, saluting him with respect, "I am in the presence of a master?"

"Yes; act, therefore, accordingly."

"And you wish to know —"

"My real state."

"Well," said the physician, "it is a brain fever, otherwise called acute meningitis, which has reached its highest degree of intensity."

"There is no hope, then?" asked the Franciscan, briefly.

"I do not say that," replied the doctor; "yet, considering the disordered state of the brain, the hurried respiration, the rapidity of the pulse, and the burning nature of the fever which is devouring you—"

"And which has thrice prostrated me since this morning," said the friar.

"Therefore I should call it a dangerous attack. But why did you not stop on the road?"

"I was expected here, and I was obliged to come."

"Even at the risk of your life?"

"Yes, at the risk of dying!"

"Very well; considering all the symptoms of your case, I must tell you that your condition is almost desperate."

The Franciscan smiled in a strange manner. "What you have just told me is perhaps sufficient for what is due to an affiliated member, even of the eleventh year; but for what is due to me, M. Grisart, it is too little, and I have a right to demand more. Come, then, let us be more candid still, and as frank as if we were making our confession to Heaven. Besides, I have already sent for a confessor."

"Oh! I hope, however," murmured the doctor.

"Answer me," said the sick man, displaying with a dignified gesture a golden ring, the stone of which had until that moment been turned inside, and which bore engraved thereon the distinguishing mark of the Society of Jesus.

Grisart uttered a loud exclamation. "The general!" he cried.

"Silence!" said the Franciscan; "you now understand that the truth is everything."

"Monseigneur, Monseigneur," murmured Grisart, "send for the confessor; for in two hours, at the next seizure, you will be attacked by delirium, and will pass away in the course of it."

"Very well," said the patient, for a moment contracting his eyebrows; "I have still two hours to live, then?"

"Yes; particularly if you take the potion I shall send you presently."

"And that will give me two hours more?"

"Two hours."

"I would take it, were it poison; for those two hours are necessary not only for myself, but for the glory of the order."

"What a loss, what a catastrophe for us all!" murmured the physician.

"It is the loss of one man, that is all," replied the Franciscan; "and Heaven will enable the poor monk who is about to leave you, to find a worthy successor. Adieu, M. Grisart; it is a boon from Heaven, indeed, that I have met you. A physician who had not been one of our holy congregation would have left me in ignorance of my condition; and relying on a few days more of existence, I should not have taken the necessary precautions. You are a learned man, M. Grisart, and that confers an honor upon us all; it would have been repugnant to my feelings to have found one of our order of little standing in his profession. Adieu, M. Grisart! send me the cordial immediately."

"Give me your blessing, at least, Monseigneur."

"In my mind I do; go, go!—in my mind I do so, I tell you,—*animo*, M. Grisart, *viribus impossibile;*" and he again fell back in the arm-chair, almost fainting again. M. Grisart hesitated whether he should give him immediate assistance, or should run to prepare the cordial he had promised. He doubtless decided in favor of the cordial, for he darted out of the room and disappeared down the staircase.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE STATE SECRET.

A FEW moments after Dr. Grisart's departure, the confessor arrived. He had hardly crossed the threshold of the door when the Franciscan fixed a penetrating look upon him, and shaking his head murmured, "A weak mind, I see; may Heaven forgive me for dying without the help of this living piece of human infirmity!" The confessor, on his side, regarded the dying man with astonishment, almost with terror. He had never beheld eyes so burningly bright at the very moment when they were about to close, nor looks so terrible when they were about to be quenched in death. The Franciscan made a rapid and imperious sign with his hand. "Sit down there, my father," he said, "and listen to me!" The Jesuit confessor — a good and simple priest, a recently initiated member of the order, who had seen only the beginning of its mysteries — yielded to the superiority assumed by the penitent.

"There are several persons staying in this hostelry," continued the Franciscan.

"But," inquired the Jesuit, "I thought that I had been summoned to receive confession. Is your remark, then, a confession?"

"Why do you ask me?"

"In order to know whether I am to keep your words secret."

"My remarks are part of my confession; I confide them to you in your character of a confessor."

"Very well," said the priest, installing himself in the chair which the Franciscan had with great difficulty just left in order to lie down on the bed.

The Franciscan continued: "I repeat, there are several persons staying in this inn."

"So I have heard."

"They ought to be eight in number."

The Jesuit made a sign that he understood him. "The first to whom I wish to speak," said the dying man, "is a German from Vienna, whose name is the Baron von Wostpur. Be kind enough to go and find him, and tell him that the person he expected has arrived."

The confessor, astounded, looked at his penitent; the confession seemed a singular one.

"Obey!" said the Franciscan, in a tone of command impossible to resist.

The good Jesuit, completely subdued, rose and left the room As soon as he had gone, the Franciscan again took up the papers which a crisis of the fever had already once before obliged him to put aside. "The Baron von Wostpur? Good!" he said; "ambitious, a fool, and straitened in his means."

The monk folded up the papers, which he thrust under his pillow. Rapid footsteps were heard at the end of the corridor. The confessor returned, followed by the Baron von Wostpur, who walked along with his head raised, as though it were incumbent upon him to break through the ceiling with the feather in his hat. Therefore, upon seeing the Franciscan with his melancholy look, and the plainness of the room, he stopped and inquired, "Who summoned me?"

"I," said the Franciscan, who turned towards the con-

fessor, saying, "My good father, leave us for a moment together; when this gentleman leaves, you will return here."

The Jesuit left the room, and doubtless availed himself of this momentary absence from the chamber of the dying man to ask the host for some explanation about this strange penitent, who treated his confessor no better than he would a *valet de chambre*.

The baron approached the bed, and wished to speak; but the hand of the Franciscan imposed silence upon him. "Every moment is precious," said the latter, hurriedly. "You have come here for the competition, have you not?"

"Yes, my father."

"You hope to be elected general of the order?"

"I hope so."

"You know on what conditions alone you can possibly attain this high position, which makes one man the master of monarchs, the equal of popes?"

"Who are you," inquired the baron, "to subject me to these interrogatories?"

"I am he whom you expect."

"The elector-general?"

"I am the elected."

"You are — "

The Franciscan did not give him time to finish; he extended his shrunken hand, on which glittered the ring of the general of the order.

The baron drew back in surprise; and then immediately afterwards, bowing with the profoundest respect, he exclaimed, "Is it possible that you are here, Monseigneur? — you, in this wretched room; you, upon this miserable bed; you, in search of and selecting the future general, — that is, your own successor!"

"Do not distress yourself about that, Monsieur, but

fulfil immediately the principal condition, — that of furnishing the order with a secret of such importance that one of the greatest courts of Europe may be by your instrumentality forever bound to the order. Well, do you possess the secret which you promised in your request addressed to the Grand Council?"

"Monseigneur — "

"Let us proceed, however, in due order. You are the Baron von Wostpur?"

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"And this letter is from you?"

The general of the Jesuits drew a paper from his bundle, and presented it to the baron, who glanced at it, and made a sign in the affirmative, saying, "Yes, Monseigneur, this letter is mine."

"Can you show me the reply which the secretary of the Grand Council returned to you?"

"This is it, Monseigneur," said the baron, holding towards the Franciscan a letter bearing simply the address, "To his Excellency the Baron von Wostpur," and containing only this phrase, "From the 15th to the 22d of May, Fontainebleau, the hotel of the Beau-Paon. — A. M. D. G."[1]

"Right!" said the Franciscan; "here we are in presence. Speak!"

"I have a body of troops composed of fifty thousand men; all the officers are gained. I am encamped on the Danube. In four days I can overthrow the emperor, who is, as you are aware, opposed to the progress of our order, and can replace him by whichever of the princes of his family the order may determine upon."

The Franciscan listened unmoved. "Is that all?" he said.

[1] Ad majorem Dei gloriam.

"A revolution throughout Europe is included in my plan," said the baron.

"Very well, M. de Wostpur, you will receive a reply; return to your room, and leave Fontainebleau within a quarter of an hour."

The baron withdrew backwards, just as obsequiously as if he were taking leave of the emperor whom he was ready to betray.

"There is no secret there," murmured the Franciscan, "it is a plot. Besides," he added, after a moment's reflection, "the future of Europe is no longer in the House of Austria;" and with a red pencil which he held in his hand he struck the Baron von Wostpur's name from the list. "Now for the cardinal," he said; "we ought to get something more serious on the part of Spain." Raising his eyes, he perceived the confessor, who was awaiting his orders as submissively as a school-boy. "Ah!" he said, noticing his submissive air, "you have been talking with the landlord."

"Yes, Monseigneur; and to the physician."

"To Grisart?"

"Yes."

"He is here, then?"

"He is waiting with the potion he promised."

"Very well; if I require him, I will call. You now understand the great importance of my confession, do you not?"

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"Then go and fetch me the Spanish Cardinal Herrebia. Make haste! Only, as you now understand the matter in hand, you will remain near me, for I begin to feel faint."

"Shall I summon the physician?"

"Not yet, not yet — the Spanish Cardinal — no one else. Fly!"

Five minutes afterwards the cardinal, pale and disturbed, entered the little room.

"I am informed, Monseigneur — " stammered the cardinal.

"To the point," said the Franciscan in a faint voice, showing the cardinal a letter which he had written to the Grand Council. "Is that your handwriting?" he asked.

"Yes, but — "

"And your summons here?"

The cardinal hesitated to answer. His purple revolted against the mean garb of the poor Franciscan. The dying man stretched out his hand and displayed the ring, which produced its effect, greater in proportion to the elevation of the person over whom the Franciscan exercised his influence.

"Quick! the secret, the secret!" demanded the dying man, leaning upon his confessor.

"*Coram isti?*" inquired the Spanish cardinal.

"Speak in Spanish," said the Franciscan, showing the most eager attention.

"You are aware, Monseigneur," said the cardinal, continuing the conversation in the Castilian dialect, "that the condition of the marriage of the Infanta with the King of France is the absolute renunciation of the rights of the said Infanta, as well as of King Louis XIV., to all claim to the crown of Spain." The Franciscan made a sign in the affirmative. "The consequence is," continued the cardinal, "that the peace and alliance between the two kingdoms depend upon the observance of that clause of the contract." A similar sign from the Franciscan. "Not only France and Spain," said the cardinal, "but the whole of Europe even, would be violently rent asunder by the faithlessness of either party." Another movement of the sick man's head. "It further results," continued

the speaker, "that the man who might be able to foresee events, and to render certain that which is no more than a vague idea floating in the mind of man, — that is to say, the idea of future good or evil, — would preserve the world from a great catastrophe; and the divining of future events in the very brain of him who prepares them could be turned to the advantage of our order."

"*Pronto, pronto!*" murmured the Franciscan, who suddenly became paler, and leaned upon the priest.

The cardinal approached the ear of the dying man, and said: "Well, Monseigneur, I know that the King of France has determined that at the first pretext — a death for instance, either that of the King of Spain or that of a brother of the Infanta — France will, arms in hand, claim the inheritance; and I have in my possession, already prepared, the plan of policy agreed upon by Louis XIV. for that emergency."

"And this plan?" said the Franciscan.

"Here it is," returned the cardinal.

"In whose handwriting is it?"

"In my own."

"Have you anything further to say?"

"I think that I have said a good deal, Monseigneur," replied the cardinal.

"Yes, you have rendered the order a great service. But how did you procure the details by the aid of which you have constructed your plan?"

"I have the under servants of the King of France in my pay, and I obtain from them all the waste papers, which have been saved from being burned."

"Very ingenious," murmured the Franciscan, endeavoring to smile. "Monsieur the Cardinal, you will leave this hotel in a quarter of an hour, and a reply shall be sent you. Go!"

The cardinal withdrew.

"Call Grisart, and go and bring me the Venetian Marini," said the sick man.

While the confessor obeyed, the Franciscan, instead of striking out the cardinal's name, as he had done the baron's, made a cross at the side of it. Then, exhausted by the effort, he fell back on his bed, murmuring the name of Dr. Grisart. When he returned to his senses, he had drunk about half of the potion, of which the remainder was left in the glass, and he found himself supported by the physician, while the Venetian and the confessor were standing close to the door. The Venetian submitted to the same formalities as his two competitors, and hesitated as they had done at the sight of the two strangers; but, his confidence restored by the order of the general, he revealed that the Pope, terrified at the power of the order, was weaving a plot for the general expulsion of the Jesuits, and was tampering with the different courts of Europe, with the purpose of obtaining their assistance. He described the pontiff's auxiliaries, his means of action, and indicated the particular locality in the Archipelago whither, by a sudden surprise, two cardinals — adepts of the eleventh year, and consequently high in authority — were to be transported, together with thirty-two of the principal affiliated members at Rome.

The Franciscan thanked the Signor Marini. It was by no means a slight service he had rendered the society by denouncing this pontifical project. The Venetian thereupon received directions to depart in a quarter of an hour, and left as radiant as if he already possessed the ring, the sign of the supreme authority of the society. As he was going away, however, the Franciscan murmured on his bed: "All these men are either spies or a sort of police; not one of them is a general. They have all dis-

closed a plot, but not one of them a secret. It is not by means of ruin or war or force that the Society of Jesus is to be governed, but by that mysterious influence which moral superiority confers. No, the man is not yet found; and to complete the misfortune, Heaven strikes me down, and I am dying. Oh! must the society indeed fall with me for want of a column to support it? Must death, which is waiting for me, swallow up with me the future of the order, — that future which ten years more of my own life would have rendered eternal? For that future, with the reign of the new king, is opening radiant and full of splendor."

These words, partly of meditation, partly uttered aloud, were listened to by the Jesuit confessor with a terror similar to that with which one listens to the wanderings of a person attacked by fever; while Grisart, with a mind of a higher order, drank them in as the revelations of an unknown world, which his eyes could see, but which his hand could not reach.

Suddenly the Franciscan roused himself. "Let us finish this," he said; "death is approaching. Oh! just now I was dying resignedly, for I hoped — while now I sink in despair, unless those who remain — Grisart, Grisart, make me live an hour longer!"

Grisart approached the dying monk, and made him swallow a few drops, not of the potion which was still left in the glass, but of the contents of a flask he had upon his person.

"Call the Scotchman!" exclaimed the Franciscan; "call the Bremen merchant! Call, call quickly! I am dying; I am suffocated."

The confessor darted forward to seek for assistance, — as if there had been any human strength which could hold back the hand of death, which lay heavily upon the sick

man; but at the threshold of the door he found Aramis, who with his finger on his lips, like the statue of Harpocrates, the god of silence, by a look motioned him back to the farther end of the apartment. The physician and the confessor, after having consulted each other by their looks, made a movement as if to keep Aramis back, who, however, with two signs of the cross, each made in a different manner, transfixed them both in their places.

"A chief!" they both murmured.

Aramis slowly advanced into the room where the dying man was struggling against the first attack of the death agony. Whether through the effect of the elixir, or because the appearance of Aramis had restored his strength, he made a movement, and with his eyes glaring, his mouth half open, and his hair damp with sweat, sat up on the bed. Aramis felt that the air of the room was stifling. All the windows were closed; the fire was burning upon the hearth; a pair of candles of yellow wax were guttering down in the copper candlesticks, and by their thick smoke still further heated the atmosphere of the room. He opened the window, and fixing upon the dying man a look full of intelligence and respect said to him: "Monseigneur, pray forgive my coming in this manner, before you summoned me; but your state alarms me, and I thought that you might possibly die before you had seen me, for I am the sixth on your list."

The dying man started and looked at the list.

"You are, then, he who was formerly called Aramis, and since the Chevalier d'Herblay? You are the Bishop of Vannes, then?"

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"I know you, I have seen you."

"At the last jubilee we were with the Holy Father together."

"Yes, yes, I remember; and you place yourself on the list of candidates?"

"Monseigneur, I have heard it said that the order required to become possessed of a great State secret; and knowing that from modesty you had in anticipation resigned your functions in favor of the person who should produce this secret, I wrote to say that I was ready to compete, possessing alone a secret which I believe to be important."

"Speak!" said the Franciscan; "I am ready to listen to you, and to judge of the importance of the secret."

"Monseigneur, a secret of the value of that which I have the honor to confide to you cannot be communicated by speech. Any idea which has once escaped from the limbo of thought and become vulgarized by any manifestation or communication of it whatever, no longer is the property of him who gave it birth. My words may be overheard by some inquisitive and hostile ear; one ought not, therefore, to speak at random, for in such a case the secret would cease to be one."

"How do you propose, then, to convey your secret?" inquired the dying monk.

With one hand Aramis signed to the physician and the confessor to withdraw, and with the other he handed to the Franciscan a paper enclosed in a double envelope.

"Is not writing more dangerous still than language?" asked the Franciscan.

"No, Monseigneur," said Aramis, "for you will find within this envelope characters which you and I alone can understand." The Franciscan looked at Aramis, with an astonishment which momentarily increased. "It is a cipher," continued the latter, "which you used in 1655, and which your secretary, Juan Jujan, who is dead, alone could decipher, if he were to be restored to life."

"You knew this cipher, then?"

"It was I who taught it to him," said Aramis, bowing with graceful respect, and advancing towards the door as if to leave the room; but a gesture of the Franciscan, accompanied by a cry for him to remain, detained him.

"*Jésus!*" cried the dying man; "*ecce homo!*" Then reading the paper a second time, he called out, "Approach, approach quickly!"

Aramis returned to the side of the Franciscan, with the same calm countenance and the same respectful manner. The Franciscan, extending his arm, burned by the flame of the candle the paper which Aramis had handed him. Then taking hold of Aramis's hand, he drew him towards him, and inquired, "In what manner and by whose means could you possibly have become acquainted with such a secret?"

"Through Madame de Chevreuse, the intimate friend and confidante of the queen."

"And Madame de Chevreuse?"

"Is dead."

"Did any others know it?"

"A man and woman only, and they of the lower classes."

"Who were they?"

"Persons who had brought him up."

"What has become of them?"

"Dead also. This secret burns like fire."

"And you have survived?"

"No one is aware that I know it."

"And for what length of time have you possessed this secret?"

"For the last fifteen years."

"And you have kept it?"

"I wished to live."

"And you give it to the order without ambition, with out requital?"

"I give it to the order with ambition and with a hope of return," said Aramis; "for if you live, Monseigneur, you will make of me, now that you know me, what I can and ought to be."

"And as I am dying," exclaimed the Franciscan, "I constitute you my successor. Take this!" and drawing off the ring, he slipped it on Aramis's finger. Then turning towards the two spectators of this scene, he said: "Be ye witnesses of this, and testify, if need be, that, sick in body but sound in mind, I have freely and voluntarily bestowed this ring, the token of supreme authority, upon Monseigneur d'Herblay, Bishop of Vannes, whom I nominate my successor, and before whom I, an humble sinner, about to appear before my Maker, prostrate myself the first, as an example for all to follow;" and the Franciscan bowed lowly and submissively, while the physician and the Jesuit fell on their knees. Aramis, while he became paler than the dying man himself, bent his looks successively upon all the participants in this scene. Gratified ambition flowed with his blood to his heart.

"We must lose no time," said the Franciscan; "what I had to do here oppresses me, devours me! I shall never accomplish it."

"I will do it," said Aramis.

"That is well," said the Franciscan; and then turning towards the Jesuit and the physician, he added, "Leave us alone." They both obeyed. "With this sign," he said, "you are the man needed to shake the world; with this sign you will cast down; with this sign you will build up, — *in hoc signo vinces!* Close the door," he continued. Aramis shut and bolted the door, and returned

to the side of the Franciscan. "The Pope has conspired against the order," said the monk; "the Pope must die."

"He shall die," said Aramis, quietly.

"Seven hundred thousand livres are owing to a Bremen merchant of the name of Donstett, who came here to get the guarantee of my signature."

"He shall be paid," said Aramis.

"Six knights of Malta, whose names are written here, have discovered, by the indiscreetness of one of the affiliated of the eleventh year, the third mysteries; it must be ascertained what these men have done with the secret, to get it back again and suppress it."

"It shall be done."

"Three dangerous affiliated members must be sent away into Thibet, to perish there; they are condemned. Here are their names."

"I will see that the sentence be carried out."

"Lastly, there is a lady at Anvers, grand-nicce of Ravaillac; she holds certain papers in her hands which compromise the order. There has been payable to the family during the last fifty-one years a pension of fifty thousand livres. The pension is a heavy one, and the order is not wealthy. Redeem the papers for a sum of money paid down, or in case of refusal stop the pension — but without risk."

"I will consider the matter," said Aramis.

"A vessel coming from Lima should have entered the port of Lisbon last week; ostensibly it is laden with chocolate, in reality with gold. Every ingot is concealed by a coating of chocolate. The vessel belongs to the order; it is worth seventeen million livres. You will see that claim is laid to it; here are the bills of lading."

"To what port shall I direct it to be taken?"

"To Bayonne."

"Before three weeks are over it shall be there, wind and weather permitting. Is that all?"

The Franciscan made a sign in the affirmative, for he could no longer speak. The blood rushed to his throat and his head, and gushed from his mouth, his nostrils, and his eyes. The dying man had barely time to press Aramis's hand, when he fell from his bed in convulsions upon the floor.

Aramis placed his hand on the Franciscan's heart, but it had ceased to beat. As he stooped down, he observed that a fragment of the paper which he had given to the Franciscan had escaped being burned. He picked it up and burned it to the last atom. Then, summoning the confessor and the physician, he said to the former: "Your penitent is in heaven; he needs nothing more than prayers and the burial bestowed on the dead. Go and prepare what is necessary for a simple interment, such as a poor monk only would require. Go!" The Jesuit left the room. Then, turning towards the physician, and observing his pale and anxious face, he said, in a low tone of voice, "M. Grisart, empty and clean this glass; there is left in it too much of what the Grand Council desired you to put into it." Grisart, amazed, overcome, completely astounded, almost fell backwards in his extreme terror. Aramis shrugged his shoulders in sign of pity, took the glass, and poured out the contents among the ashes of the hearth. He then left the room, carrying the papers of the dead man with him.

CHAPTER LVIII.

MISSION.

THE next day, or rather the same day (for the events we have just described had been concluded only at three o'clock in the morning), before breakfast was served, and as the king was preparing to go to Mass with the two queens; as Monsieur, with the Chevalier de Lorraine and a few other intimate companions, was mounting his horse to set off for the river, to take one of those famous baths for which the ladies of the court were almost wild; when, in fact, no one remained in the château with the exception of Madame, who under the pretext of indisposition would not leave her room, — Montalais was seen, or rather was not seen, to glide stealthily out of the room appropriated to the maids of honor, leading La Vallière after her, who tried to conceal herself as much as possible; and both of them, hurrying secretly through the gardens, succeeded, looking round them at every step they took, in reaching the thicket.

The weather was cloudy; a hot wind bowed the flowers and the shrubs; the burning dust, caught up from the roads, was whirled in eddies towards the trees. Montalais, who during their progress had discharged the functions of a clever scout, advanced a few steps farther, and turning round again, to be quite sure that no one was either listening or approaching, said to her companion, "Thank goodness, we are quite alone! Since yesterday every one spies us here, and a circle seems to be drawn round us, as if we were plague-stricken." La

Vallière bent down her head and sighed. "It is positively unheard of!" continued Montalais; "from M. Malicorne to M. de Saint-Aignan, every one wishes to get hold of our secret. Come, Louise, let us confer together a little, in order that I may know what plan of action to pursue."

La Vallière lifted upon her companion her beautiful eyes, pure and deep as the azure of a summer sky. "And I," she said, — "I will ask you, why have we been summoned to Madame's own apartment? Why have we slept there, instead of sleeping, as usual, in our own? Why did you return so late, and whence are these measures of strict supervision which have been adopted since this morning with respect to us?"

"My dear Louise, you answer my question by another, or rather by ten others, — which is not answering me at all. I will tell you all that later; and as they are matters of secondary importance, you can wait. What I ask you — for everything will depend upon that — is, whether there is or is not any secret."

"I do not know that there is any secret," said La Vallière; "but I do know, for my own part at least, that there has been great imprudence committed. Since the foolish remark I made, and my still more silly fainting yesterday, every one here is making remarks about us."

"Speak for yourself, my dear," said Montalais, laughing, — "speak for yourself and for Tonnay-Charente; for both of you made your declarations of love to the skies yesterday, and unfortunately they were intercepted."

La Vallière hung down her head. "Really, you overwhelm me," she said.

"I?"

"Yes; you are killing me with your jests."

"Listen to me, Louise! These are no jests; on the

contrary, nothing is more serious. I did not drag you out of the château, I did not miss attending Mass, I did not pretend to have a headache, — as Madame did, and which she has as much as I have, — and lastly I did not display ten times more diplomacy than M. Colbert inherited from M. de Mazarin and makes use of with respect to M. Fouquet, in order to find means of confiding my perplexities to you, for the sole end and purpose that when at last we are alone and no one can listen to us, you are to continue to deal hypocritically with me. No, no! believe me that when I ask you any questions it is not from curiosity alone, but really because the position is a critical one. What you said yesterday is now known; it is a text on which every one is discoursing. Every one embellishes it to the utmost, according to his own fancy. You had the honor last night, and you have it still to-day, of occupying the whole court, my dear; and the number of tender and witty remarks which have been ascribed to you would make Mademoiselle de Scudéry and her brother burst from very spite if they were faithfully reported to them."

"But, dearest Montalais," said the poor girl, "you know better than any one what I did say, since you were present when I said it."

"Yes, I know; but that is not the question. I have not even forgotten a single syllable you said; but did you think the thing you said?"

Louise became confused. "What!" she exclaimed, "more questions still? Oh, heavens! when I would give the whole world to forget what I did say, how does it happen that every one does his utmost to remind me of it? Oh, this is indeed terrible!"

"What is?"

"To have a friend who ought to spare me, who might

advise me and help me to save myself, and yet who is destroying — is killing me."

"There, there, that will do!" said Montalais; "after having said too little, you now say too much. No one thinks of killing you, nor even of robbing you, even of your secret. I wish to have it voluntarily, and in no other way, — for the question does not concern your own affairs only, but ours also; and Tonnay-Charente would tell you as I do, if she were here. For the fact is that last evening she wished to have some private conversation in our room; and I was going there after the Manicampian and Malicornian colloquies had terminated, when I learned on my return — rather late, it is true — that Madame had sequestered her maids of honor, and that we are to sleep in her apartments instead of our own rooms. Moreover, Madame has sequestered her maids of honor in order that they should not have the time to concert any measures together; and this morning she was closeted with Tonnay-Charente with the same object. Tell me, then, dear friend, to what extent Athenais and I can rely upon you, as we will tell you in what way you can rely upon us."

"I do not clearly understand the question you have put," said Louise, much agitated.

"Hum! and yet, on the contrary, you seem to understand me very well. However, I will put my questions in a more precise manner, in order that you may not be able in the slightest degree to evade them. Listen to me! *Do you love M. de Bragelonne?* That is plain enough, is it not?"

At this question, which fell like the first projectile of a besieging army into a besieged town, Louise started. "You ask me," she exclaimed, "if I love Raoul, the friend of my childhood, — my brother, almost!"

"No, no, no! Again you evade me, — or you wish to evade me. I do not ask you if you love Raoul, your childhood's friend, your brother, but I ask if you love M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne, your affianced husband."

"Good heavens, my dear Montalais!" said Louise; "how severe your tone is!"

"You deserve no indulgence. I am neither more nor less severe than usual. I put a question to you; so answer it!"

"You certainly do not," said Louise, in a choking voice, "speak to me like a friend; but I will answer you as a true friend."

"Well, do so."

"Very well; my heart is full of scruples and silly feelings of pride with respect to everything that a woman ought to keep secret, and in this respect no one has ever read my inmost heart."

"That I know very well. If I had read it, I should not ask you questions; I should simply say: 'My good Louise, you have the happiness of an acquaintance with M. de Bragelonne, who is an excellent young man, and an advantageous match for a girl without any fortune. M. de la Fère will leave something like fifteen thousand livres a year to his son. At a future day, then, you, as this son's wife, will have fifteen thousand livres a year, — which is not bad. Turn, then, neither to the right hand nor to the left, but go frankly to M. de Bragelonne, — that is to say, to the altar to which he will lead you. Afterwards, — why, afterwards, according to his disposition, you will be emancipated or enslaved; in other words, you will have a right to commit any piece of folly which people commit who have either too much liberty or too little.' That is, my dear Louise, what I should have told you at first, if I had been able to read your heart."

"And I should have thanked you," stammered Louise, "although the advice does not appear to me to be altogether good."

"Wait, wait! But immediately after having given you that advice, I should add: 'Louise, it is dangerous to pass whole days with your head reclining on your bosom, your hands unoccupied, your eyes wandering; it is dangerous to prefer the least-frequented paths, and no longer to be amused with such diversions as gladden young girls' hearts; it is dangerous, Louise, to write with the point of your foot, as you are doing upon the gravel, certain letters which it is useless for you to efface, but which appear again under your heel, particularly when those letters rather resemble the letter L than the letter B; and lastly, it is dangerous to allow the mind to dwell on a thousand wild fancies, the fruits of solitude and headaches. These fancies, while they sink into a young girl's mind, make her cheeks sink in also; so that it is not unusual under such circumstances to find the most delightful persons in the world becoming the most disagreeable, and the wittiest becoming the dullest.'"

"I thank you, my dearest Aure," replied La Vallière, gently; "it is like you to speak to me in this manner, and I thank you for it."

"It was only for the benefit of wild dreamers, such as I described, that I spoke; do not take any of my words, then, to yourself except such as you think you deserve. Stay! I hardly know what story recurs to my memory of some silly or melancholy young girl, — for M. Dangeau explained to me the other day that *mélancolie* should be grammatically written *mélancholie*, with an *h*, because the French word is formed of two Greek words, of which one means *black* and the other *bile*. I return, then, to that young woman who was dying of *black bile* because

she fancied that the prince or the king or the emperor, whoever it was, — and it does not much matter which, — had fallen completely in love with her; while, on the contrary, the prince or the king or the emperor, whichever you please, was plainly in love with some one else, and (a singular circumstance, — one, indeed, which she could not perceive, although every one around and about her perceived it clearly enough) made use of her as a screen for his own love-affair. You laugh, as I do, at this poor silly girl, do you not, La Vallière?"

"I laugh, of course," stammered Louise, pale as death.

"And you are right, too, for the thing is amusing enough. The story, whether true or false, amused me; and so I have remembered it and told it to you. Just imagine, then, my good Louise, the mischief that such a melancholy would create in your brain, — a melancholy, I mean, with an *h*. For my own part I resolved to tell you the story; for if such a thing were to happen to one of us, she ought to be well assured of this truth: to-day it is a snare; to-morrow it will become a jest and mockery; the next day it will be death itself." La Vallière started again, and became, if possible, still paler. "Whenever a king takes notice of us," continued Montalais, "he lets us see it easily enough; and if we happen to be the object he covets, he knows very well how to gain his object. You see, then, Louise, that in such circumstances, between young girls exposed to such a danger, the most perfect confidence should exist, in order that those hearts which are not disposed towards melancholy may watch over those which are likely to become so."

"Silence, silence!" exclaimed La Vallière; "some one is approaching."

"Some one is indeed approaching," said Montalais;

"but who can it be? Everybody is away, either at Mass with the king or bathing with Monsieur."

At the end of the walk the young girls perceived almost immediately, beneath the arching trees, the graceful carriage and noble height of a young man, who with his sword under his arm and a cloak thrown across his shoulders, and booted and spurred besides, saluted them from the distance with a charming smile.

"Raoul!" exclaimed Montalais.

"M. de Bragelonne!" murmured Louise.

"A very proper judge to decide upon our difference of opinion," said Montalais.

"Oh, Montalais, Montalais, for pity's sake," exclaimed La Vallière, "after having been so cruel, show me a little mercy!"

These words, uttered with all the fervor of a prayer, effaced all trace of irony from Montalais's face, if not from her heart also. "Why, you are as handsome as Amadis, M. de Bragelonne," she cried to Raoul, "and armed and booted like him!"

"A thousand compliments, Mesdemoiselles," replied Raoul, bowing.

"But why, I ask, are you booted in this manner?" repeated Montalais; while La Vallière, although she looked at Raoul with a surprise equal to that of her companion, nevertheless uttered not a word.

"Why?" inquired Raoul.

"Yes," ventured La Vallière, in turn.

"Because I am going away," said Bragelonne, looking at Louise.

The young girl felt herself smitten by some superstitious feeling of terror, and tottered. "You are going away, Raoul!" she cried; "and where are you going?"

"Dearest Louise," replied the young man, with that

quiet, composed manner which was natural to him, "I am going to England."

"What are you going to do in England?"

"The king has sent me there."

"The king!" exclaimed Louise and Aure together, involuntarily exchanging glances, the conversation which had just been interrupted recurring to them both.

Raoul intercepted the glance, but he could not understand its meaning, and, naturally enough, attributed it to the interest which both the young girls took in him. "His Majesty," he said, "has been good enough to remember that M. le Comte de la Fère is high in favor with King Charles II. This morning, then, as he was on his way to attend Mass, the king, seeing me as he passed, signed to me to approach, which I accordingly did. 'M. de Bragelonne,' he said to me, 'you will call upon M. Fouquet, who has received from me letters for the King of Great Britain; you will be the bearer of those letters.' I bowed. 'Ah!' his Majesty added, 'before you leave, you will be good enough to take any commissions which Madame may have for the king her brother.'"

"Gracious Heaven!" murmured Louise, much agitated, and yet full of thought at the same time.

"So quickly! You are desired to set off in such haste!" said Montalais, almost paralyzed by this unforeseen event.

"Properly to obey those whom we respect," said Raoul, "it is necessary to obey quickly. Within ten minutes after I had received the order, I was ready. Madame, already informed, is writing the letter which she is so kind as to do me the honor of intrusting to me. In the mean time, learning from Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente that it was likely you would be in the direction of the grove, I came here, and am happy to find you both."

"And both of us in great suffering, as you see," said

Montalais, coming to Louise's assistance, whose countenance was visibly altered.

"Suffering?" repeated Raoul, pressing Louise de la Vallière's hand with a tender curiosity. "Why, really, your hand is like ice."

"It is nothing."

"This coldness does not reach your heart, Louise, does it?" inquired the young man, with a tender smile.

Louise raised her head hastily, as if this question had been inspired by some suspicion, and had aroused a feeling of remorse. "Oh, you know," she said with an effort, "that my heart will never be cold towards a friend like yourself, M. de Bragelonne."

"Thank you, Louise. I know both your heart and your mind, and it is not by the touch of the hand that one can judge of an affection like yours. You know, Louise, how devotedly I love you, with what perfect and unreserved confidence I have resigned my life to you; will you not forgive me, then, for speaking to you with something like the frankness of a child?"

"Speak, M. Raoul," said Louise, trembling very much; "I am listening."

"I cannot part from you carrying away with me a thought which torments me. Absurd I know it to be, and yet it is one which rends my very heart."

"Are you going away, then, for any length of time?" inquired La Vallière, with a thickened utterance, while Montalais turned her head aside.

"No; and probably I shall not be absent more than a fortnight." La Vallière pressed her hand upon her heart, which felt as though it were breaking. "It is strange," pursued Raoul, looking at the young girl with a melancholy expression. "I have often left you when setting off on adventures fraught with danger. Then I started joy-

ously enough, — my heart free, my mind intoxicated by the thought of happiness to come, of hopes for the future; and yet at that time I was about to face the Spanish cannon or the cruel halberds of the Walloons. To-day, without the existence of any danger or uneasiness and by the easiest manner in the world, I am going in search of a glorious recompense, which this mark of the king's favor promises me; for I am, perhaps, going to win you, Louise. What other favor, more precious than yourself, could the king confer upon me? Yet, Louise, in very truth, I know not how or why, but all this happiness and all this future seem to vanish from my eyes like smoke, like an idle dream; and I feel here, here at the very bottom of my heart, a deep-seated grief, a dejection which I cannot express in words, — something heavy, torpid, death-like. Oh, Louise, too well do I know why; it is because I have never loved you so truly as now. Oh, my God! my God!"

At this last exclamation, which issued as it were from a broken heart, Louise burst into tears, and threw herself into Montalais's arms. The latter, although she was not very easily moved with emotion, felt the tears rush to her eyes and her heart compressed as though in a vice. Raoul saw only the tears of his betrothed; his look, however, did not penetrate — nay, sought not to penetrate — beyond those tears. He bent his knee before her, and tenderly kissed her hand; and it was evident that in that kiss he poured out his whole heart before her.

"Rise, rise," said Montalais to him, herself ready to cry; "for here is Athenais coming."

Raoul rose, brushed his knee with the back of his hand, smiled again upon Louise, whose eyes were fixed on the ground, and having pressed Montalais's hand gratefully, turned to salute Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, the

sound of whose silken robe was already heard upon the gravel-walk. "Has Madame finished her letter?" he inquired, when the young girl came within reach of his voice.

"Yes, Monsieur the Viscount, the letter is finished, sealed, and her royal Highness awaits you."

Raoul at this remark hardly gave himself time to salute Athenais, cast one last look at Louise, bowed to Montalais, and withdrew in the direction of the château. As he withdrew he again turned round; but at last, at the end of the grand walk, it was useless to do so again, as he could no longer see them. The three young girls on their side had with very different feelings watched him till he disappeared.

"At last," said Athenaïs, the first to break the silence,—"at last we are alone, free to talk of yesterday's great affair, and to come to an understanding upon the conduct it is advisable for us to pursue. Besides, if you will listen to me," she continued, looking round on all sides, "I will explain to you as briefly as possible, in the first place, our own duty, such as I understand it, and, if you do not understand a hint, what is Madame's desire on the subject."

Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente pronounced these words in such a tone as to leave no doubt, in her companions' minds, of the official character with which she was invested.

"Madame's desire!" exclaimed Montalais and Louise, together.

"Her *ultimatum*," replied Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, diplomatically.

"But, good heavens! Mademoiselle," murmured La Vallière, "does Madame know, then—"

"Madame knows more about the matter than we said

even," said Athenais, in a formal, precise manner; "therefore, Mesdemoiselles, let us come to a proper understanding."

"Yes, indeed," said Montalais; "and I am listening in breathless attention. Speak, Athenais!"

"Gracious Heaven!" murmured Louise, trembling, "shall I ever recover from that cruel evening?"

"Oh, do not frighten yourself in that manner!" said Athenaïs; "we have found a remedy for it." So, seating herself between her two companions, and taking each of them by the hand, which she held in her own, she began. The first words were hardly spoken, when they heard a horse galloping away over the stones of the public highroad, outside the gates of the château.

CHAPTER LIX.

HAPPY AS A PRINCE.

At the very moment when he was about entering the château, Bragelonne had met De Guiche. But before having been met by Raoul, De Guiche had met Manicamp, who had met Malicorne. How was it that Malicorne had met Manicamp? Nothing more simple, for he had awaited his return from Mass, where he had accompanied M. de Saint-Aignan. When they met, they had congratulated each other upon their good fortune, and Manicamp had availed himself of the circumstance to ask his friend if he had not a few crowns still remaining at the bottom of his pocket. The latter, without expressing any surprise at the question, which he perhaps expected, had answered that a pocket on which one is drawing continually without ever putting anything into it resembles those wells which can supply water during the winter, but which the gardeners exhaust during the summer; that his (Malicorne's) pocket certainly was deep, and that there would be a pleasure in drawing on it in times of plenty, but that unhappily abuse had produced barrenness.

To this remark Manicamp, deep in thought, had replied, "Quite true!"

"The question, then, is how to fill it?" Malicorne had added.

"Of course; but in what way?"

"Nothing easier, my dear M. Manicamp."

"Good! How?"

"A post in Monsieur's household, and the pocket is full again."

"You have the post?"

"That is, I have the promise of being nominated."

"Well?"

"Yes; but the promise of nomination, without the post itself, is the purse without money."

"Quite true," Manicamp had replied a second time.

"Let us try for the post, then," the candidate had persisted.

"My dear fellow," sighed Manicamp, "an appointment in Monsieur's household is one of the gravest difficulties of our position."

"Oh! oh!"

"There is no question that at the present moment we cannot ask Monsieur for anything."

"Why so?"

"Because we are not on good terms with him."

"Absurd!" said Malicorne, flatly.

"Bah! and if we were to show Madame any attention," said Manicamp, "frankly speaking, do you think we should please Monsieur?"

"Precisely; if we show Madame any attention, and do so adroitly, Monsieur ought to adore us."

"Hum!"

"Either that, or we are great fools; make haste, therefore, M. Manicamp, you who are so able a politician, to reconcile M. de Guiche to his royal Highness."

"What did M. de Saint-Aignan tell you, Malicorne?"

"Tell me? Nothing; he asked me several questions, and that was all."

"Well, he was less discreet with me."

"What did he tell you?"

"That the king is passionately in love with Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"We knew that already," replied Malicorne, ironically, "and everybody talks about it loudly enough for every one to know it; but in the mean time pray do what I advise you. Speak to M. de Guiche, and endeavor to get him to make an advance towards Monsieur. Deuce take it! he owes his royal Highness that, at least."

"But we must see De Guiche, then?"

"There does not seem to be any great difficulty in that. Try to see him in the same way in which I tried to see you; wait for him, — you know that he is naturally very fond of walking."

"Yes; but where does he walk?"

"What a question to ask! Do you not know that he is in love with Madame?"

"So it is said."

"Very well; you will find him walking about on the side of the château where her apartments are."

"Stay, my dear Malicorne! you were not mistaken, for here he comes."

"Why should I be mistaken? Have you ever noticed that I am in the habit of making mistakes? Come! we only need to understand each other. Are you in want of money?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Manicamp, mournfully.

"Well, I want my appointment. Let Malicorne have the appointment, and Manicamp shall have the money; it is not more difficult than that."

"Very well. In that case make yourself easy; I will do my best."

"Do so."

De Guiche approached. Malicorne stepped aside; and Manicamp caught hold of De Guiche, who was thought-

ful and melancholy. "Tell me, my dear count, what rhyme you were trying to find," said Manicamp. "I have an excellent one to match yours, — particularly if yours ends in *âme*."

De Guiche shook his head, and recognizing a friend, took him by the arm. "My dear Manicamp," he said, "I am in search of something very different from a rhyme."

"What is it for which you are looking?"

"You will help me to find what I am in search of," continued the count, — "you, who are such an idle fellow; in other words, a man with a mind full of ingenious devices."

"I am getting my ingenuity ready, then, my dear count."

"This is the state of the case, then: I wish to approach a particular house, where I have business."

"You must get near the house, then," said Manicamp.

"Very good; but in this house dwells a husband who happens to be jealous."

"Is he more jealous than the dog Cerberus?"

"Not more, but quite as much so."

"Has he three mouths, like that obdurate guardian of the infernal regions? Do not shrug your shoulders, my dear count! I put the question to you with a perfect reason for doing so, since poets pretend that in order to soften M. Cerberus the visitor must take something enticing with him, — a cake, for instance. Therefore I, who view the matter in a prosaic light, — that is to say, the light of reality, — I say, one cake is very little for three mouths. If your jealous husband has three mouths, Count, get three cakes."

"Manicamp, I can get such advice as that from M. Beautru."

"In order to get better advice, Monsieur the Count," said Manicamp, with comical seriousness, "you will be

obliged to adopt a more precise formula than that which you have used towards me."

"If Raoul were here," said De Guiche, "he would be sure to understand me."

"So I think, — particularly if you said to him, 'I should very much like to see *Madame* a little nearer; but I fear *Monsieur*, who is jealous.'"

"Manicamp!" cried the count, angrily, and endeavoring by a look to overwhelm his tormentor, who did not, however, appear to be in the slightest degree disturbed by it.

"What is the matter now, my dear count?" inquired Manicamp.

"What! is it thus that you blaspheme the most sacred of names?" cried De Guiche.

"What names?"

"Monsieur! Madame! — the highest names in the kingdom."

"You are very strangely mistaken, my dear count. I never mentioned the highest names in the kingdom. I merely answered you in reference to the subject of a jealous husband, whose name you did not tell me, and who as a matter of course has a wife. I therefore replied to you, 'In order to see *Madame*, you must get a little more intimate with *Monsieur*.'"

"Wretched jester!" said the count, smiling; "was that what you meant?"

"Nothing else."

"Very good; what then?"

"Now," added Manicamp, "let the question be regarding Madame la Duchesse ——— or M. le Duc ———; very well, I shall say: Let us get into the house, wherever it may be; for that is a scheme which cannot in any case be unfavorable to your love-affair."

"Ah! Manicamp, if you could find me a pretext, a good pretext."

"A pretext, *pardieu!* a hundred, nay, a thousand pretexts. If Malicorne were here, he would have already hit upon fifty thousand excellent pretexts."

"Who is Malicorne?" said De Guiche, half shutting his eyes like a person trying to recollect; "I seem to know that name."

"Know him! I should think so; you owe his father thirty thousand crowns."

"Ah, indeed! so it 's that worthy fellow from Orléans."

"Whom you promised an appointment in Monsieur's household, — not the jealous husband, but the other."

"Well, then, since your friend Malicorne is so clever, let him find me a means of being adored by Monsieur, and a pretext to make my peace with him."

"Very good; I 'll talk to him about it."

"But who is that coming?"

"The Vicomte de Bragelonne."

"Raoul! yes, it is he," said De Guiche, as he hastened forward to meet the young man. "You here, Raoul!" said he.

"Yes, I was looking for you to say farewell, my dear friend," replied Raoul, grasping the count's hand. "How do you do, M. Manicamp?"

"How is this, Viscount, — you are leaving us?"

"Yes, a mission from the king."

"Where are you going?"

"To London. On leaving you, I am going to Madame. She has a letter to give me for his Majesty King Charles II."

"You will find her alone; for Monsieur has gone out, — gone to bathe, in fact."

"In that case you, my dear friend, who are one of

Monsieur's gentlemen in waiting, will undertake to make my excuses to him. I should have waited in order to receive any directions he might have to give me, if the desire for my immediate departure had not been intimated to me by M. Fouquet on behalf of his Majesty."

Manicamp touched De Guiche's elbow. "There 's a pretext for you," said he.

"What?"

"M. de Bragelonne's excuses."

"A weak pretext," said De Guiche.

"An excellent one, if Monsieur is not angry with you; but a paltry one, like any other, if he bears you ill-will."

"You are right, Manicamp; a pretext, whatever it may be, is all I require. And so a pleasant journey to you, Raoul!" and the two friends thereupon took a warm leave of each other.

Five minutes afterwards Raoul entered Madame's apartments, as Mademoiselle de Montalais had begged him to do. Madame was still seated at the table where she had written her letter. Before her was burning the rose-colored taper which she had used to seal it. Only, in her preoccupation, — for Madame seemed to be buried in thought, — she had forgotten to extinguish the taper.

Bragelonne was expected, and was announced, therefore, as soon as he appeared. He was the picture of elegance; it was impossible to see him once without always remembering him; and not only had Madame seen him once, but it will not be forgotten that he was one of the very first who had gone to meet her, and had accompanied her from Havre to Paris. Madame had preserved, therefore, an excellent recollection of Bragelonne. "Ah, Monsieur, here you are!" she said to him; "you are going to see my brother, who will be delighted

to pay to the son a portion of the debt of gratitude he has contracted with the father."

"The Comte de la Fère, Madame, has been abundantly recompensed for the little service he had the happiness to render the king, by the kindness which the king manifested towards him; and it is I who will have to convey to his Majesty the assurance of the respect, devotion, and gratitude of father and son."

"Do you know my brother, Monsieur the Viscount?"

"No, your Highness; I shall have the honor of seeing his Majesty for the first time."

"You require no recommendation to him. At all events, however, if you have any doubt about your personal merit, take me unhesitatingly for your surety."

"Your royal Highness overwhelms me with your kindness."

"No, M. de Bragelonne, I well remember that we were fellow-travellers once, and that I remarked your extreme prudence in the midst of the extravagant absurdities committed, to your right and left, by two of the greatest simpletons in the world, M. de Guiche and the Duke of Buckingham. Let us not speak of them, however, but of yourself. Are you going to England to remain there permanently? Forgive my inquiry; it is not curiosity, but a desire to be of service to you in anything that I can do."

"No, Madame; I am going to England to fulfil a mission which his Majesty has been kind enough to confide to me, — that is all."

"And you propose to return to France?"

"As soon as I shall have accomplished my mission; unless, indeed, his Majesty King Charles II. should have other orders for me."

"He will beg you at the very least, I am sure, to remain near him as long as possible."

"In that case, as I shall not know how to refuse, I will now beforehand entreat your royal Highness to have the goodness to remind the King of France that one of his most devoted servants is far away from him."

"Take care that at the time you are recalled you do not consider his command as an abuse of power."

"I do not understand you, Madame."

"The Court of France is not easily matched, I am aware; but yet we have some pretty women at the Court of England also." Raoul smiled. "Oh," said Madame, "yours is a smile which portends no good to my countrywomen! It is as though you were telling them, M. de Bragelonne, 'I visit you, but I leave my heart on the other side of the Channel.' Did not your smile indicate that?"

"Your Highness is gifted with the power of reading the inmost depths of the soul, and you will understand, therefore, why at present any prolonged residence at the Court of England would be a matter of the deepest regret for me."

"And I need not inquire if so gallant a knight is recompensed in return?"

"I have been brought up, Madame, with her whom I love, and I believe that she has the same feelings towards me that I have for her."

"In that case do not delay your departure, M. de Bragelonne, and delay not your return, for on your return we shall see two persons happy; for I hope that no obstacle exists to your felicity."

"There is a great obstacle to it, Madame."

"Indeed! what is it?"

"The king's wishes on the subject."

"The king's wishes? The king opposes your marriage?"

"Or at least he postpones it. I solicited his Majesty's

consent through the Comte de la Fère; and without absolutely refusing it, he at least positively said that it must be deferred."

"Is the young lady whom you love unworthy of you, then?"

"She is worthy of a king's affection, Madame."

"I mean, she is not, perhaps, of birth equal to your own?"

"She is of an excellent family."

"Is she young and beautiful?"

"She is seventeen, and in my opinion exceedingly beautiful."

"Is she in the country or at Paris?"

"She is at Fontainebleau, Madame."

"At the court?"

"Yes."

"Do I know her?"

"She has the honor to form one of your royal Highness's household."

"Her name?" inquired the princess, anxiously, — "if, indeed," she added, checking herself hastily, "her name is not a secret."

"No, Madame, my affection is too pure for me to make a secret of it to any one, — and with still greater reason to your Highness, whose kindness towards me has been so extreme. It is Mademoiselle Louise de la Vallière."

Madame could not restrain an exclamation, in which there was a feeling stronger than surprise. "Ah!" she said, "La Vallière, — she who yesterday —" She paused, and then continued, "She who yesterday was taken ill, I believe?"

"Yes, Madame; it was only this morning that I heard of the accident which had befallen her."

"Did you see her before you came to me?"

"I had the honor of taking leave of her."

"And you say," resumed Madame, making a powerful effort over herself, "that the king has — deferred your marriage with this young girl?"

"Yes, Madame, deferred it."

"Did he assign any reason for this postponement?"

"None."

"How long is it since the Comte de la Fère preferred his request?"

"More than a month, Madame."

"It is very singular," said the princess, as something like a cloud passed across her eyes. "A month?" she repeated.

"About a month."

"You are right, Monsieur the Viscount," said the princess, with a smile in which Bragelonne might have remarked a kind of restraint; "my brother must not keep you too long over there. Set off at once, and in the first letter I write to England I will claim you in the king's name;" and Madame rose to place her letter in Bragelonne's hands.

Raoul understood that his audience was at an end; he took the letter, bowed low to the princess, and left the room.

"A month!" murmured the princess; "could I have been blind, then, to so great an extent, and could he have loved her for this last month?" And as Madame had nothing to do, she sat down to begin a letter to her brother, the postscript of which was a summons for Bragelonne to return.

The Comte de Guiche, as we have seen, had yielded to the pressing persuasions of Manicamp, and allowed himself to be led to the stables, where they had their horses saddled; then by the side-path, a description of

which has already been given, they advanced to meet Monsieur, who having just finished bathing was returning all fresh towards the château, wearing a woman's veil to protect his face from getting burned by the heat of the sun, which was already great. Monsieur was in one of those fits of good humor with which the admiration of his own good looks sometimes inspired him. As he was bathing he had been able to compare the whiteness of his body with that of his courtiers; and thanks to the care which his royal Highness took of himself, no one, not even the Chevalier de Lorraine, could bear the comparison. Monsieur, moreover, had been tolerably successful in swimming, and his muscles having been properly exercised by the invigorating immersion in the cool water, he was in a light and cheerful state of mind and body; so that at the sight of De Guiche, who advanced to meet him at a hand gallop, mounted upon a magnificent white horse, the prince could not restrain an exclamation of delight.

"I think matters look well," said Manicamp, who fancied he could read this friendly disposition upon his royal Highness's countenance.

"Ah, good-day, Guiche! good-day, my poor Guiche!" exclaimed the prince.

"Long life to your Highness!" replied De Guiche, encouraged by the tone of Philip's voice; "health, joy, happiness, and prosperity to your Highness!"

"Welcome, Guiche! Come on my right side, but keep your horse in hand, for I wish to return at a walking pace, under the cool shade of these trees."

"At your service, Monseigneur," replied De Guiche, taking his place on the prince's right, as he had just been invited to do.

"Now, my dear De Guiche," said the prince, "give

me a little news of that De Guiche whom I used to know formerly, and who used to pay attentions to my wife."

De Guiche blushed to the very whites of his eyes; while Monsieur burst out laughing, as though he had made the wittiest remark in the world. The few privileged courtiers who surrounded Monsieur thought it their duty to follow his example, although they had not heard the remark; and a noisy burst of laughter immediately followed, beginning with the first courtier, passing on through the whole company, and only terminating with the last. De Guiche, although blushing extremely, put a good countenance on the matter. Manicamp was watching him.

"Ah, Monseigneur," replied De Guiche, "show a little charity towards an unfortunate man; do not hold me up to the ridicule of M. le Chevalier de Lorraine."

"How do you mean?"

"If he hears you ridicule me, he will go beyond your Highness, and will show no pity."

"About your passion for the princess?"

"For mercy's sake, Monseigneur!"

"Come, come, De Guiche, confess that you did get a little sweet upon Madame."

"Never will I confess such a thing, Monseigneur!"

"Out of respect for me? Well, I release you from your respect, De Guiche. Confess, as if it were simply a question about Mademoiselle de Chalais or Mademoiselle de la Vallière." Then breaking off, he said, beginning to laugh again: "Come, that is very good, — a remark like a sword which cuts two ways at once. I hit you and my brother at the same time, — Chalais and La Vallière, your affianced bride and his future lady-love."

"Really, Monseigneur," said the count, "you are in a most brilliant humor to-day."

"Yes, upon my word, I feel well; and then I am pleased to see you again."

"Thank you, Monseigneur."

"But you were angry with me, were you not?"

"I, Monseigneur? Why should I have been so?"

"Because I interfered with your sarabands and your other Spanish amusements. Nay, do not deny it! On that day when you left the princess's apartments with your eyes full of fury, — that brought you ill luck, my dear fellow, for you danced in the ballet yesterday in a most miserable manner. Now don't get sulky, De Guiche, for it does you no good, but makes you look as surly as a bear. If the princess did look at you attentively yesterday, I am quite sure of one thing."

"What is that, Monseigneur? Your Highness alarms me."

"She has quite forsworn you now," said the prince, laughing still louder.

"Decidedly," thought Manicamp, "rank has nothing to do with it, and all men are alike."

The prince continued: "At all events, here you are back again; and it is to be hoped that the chevalier will become amiable again."

"How so, Monseigneur; and by what miracle can I exercise such an influence over M. de Lorraine?"

"The matter is very simple; he is jealous of you."

"Bah! it is not possible."

"It is the case, though."

"He does me too much honor, then."

"The fact is that when you are here he is full of kindness and attention, but when you are gone he makes me suffer a perfect martrydom. I am like a see-saw. Besides, you do not know the idea which has struck me."

"I do not even suspect it, Monseigneur."

"Well, then, when you were in exile, — for you really were exiled, my poor Guiche — "

"*Pardieu*, Monseigneur; but whose fault was it?" said De Guiche, pretending to speak in an angry tone.

"Not mine, certainly, my dear count," replied his royal Highness; "upon my honor, I did not ask the king to exile you."

"No, not you, Monseigneur, I am well aware; but — "

"But Madame; well, so far as that goes, I do not say that it is not the case. What the deuce did you do or say to Madame?"

"Really, Monseigneur — "

"Women I know have their grudges, and my wife is not free from caprices of that nature. But if she were the cause of your being exiled, I bear you no ill-will."

"In that case, Monseigneur," said De Guiche, "I am not unhappy altogether."

Manicamp, who was following closely behind De Guiche, and who did not lose a word of what the prince was saying, bent down to his very shoulders over his horse's neck, in order to conceal the laughter he could not repress.

"Besides, your exile started a project in my head."

"Good."

"When the chevalier, finding that you were no longer here, and sure of reigning undisturbed, began to bully me, I, observing that my wife, in the most perfect contrast to that wicked fellow, was most kind and amiable towards me, who had neglected her so much, conceived the idea of becoming a model husband, — a rarity, a curiosity, at the court; and I had an idea of getting very fond of my wife."

De Guiche looked at the prince with an air of amazement, which was not assumed. "Oh, Monseigneur," he

stammered tremblingly, "surely that idea did not seriously occur to you?"

"Indeed, it did. I have some property that my brother gave me on my marriage. My wife has some money of her own, and not a little either; for she gets money from her brother and brother-in-law, — from England and France. Well, we should have left the court. I should have retired to my château at Villers-Cotterets, which is part of my appanage, situated in the middle of a forest, in which we should have led a most sentimental life in the very same spot where my grandfather, Henry IV., lived with La Belle Gabrielle. What do you think of that idea, De Guiche?"

"Why, it is enough to make one shudder, Monseigneur," replied De Guiche, who shuddered in reality.

"Ah! I see that you would never be able to endure being exiled a second time."

"I, Monseigneur?"

"I will not carry you off with us, then, as I had at first intended."

"What! with you, Monseigneur?"

"Yes, if the idea should again occur to me of taking a dislike to the court."

"Oh, do not let that make any difference, Monseigneur! I would follow your Highness to the end of the world."

"Clumsy fellow that you are!" growled Manicamp, pushing his horse towards De Guiche so as almost to unseat him; and then, as Manicamp passed close to him, as if he had lost his command over the horse, he whispered, "For goodness' sake, think what you are saying!"

"Well, it is agreed, then," said the prince; "since you are so devoted to me, I shall take you with me."

"Anywhere, everywhere, Monseigneur," replied De

Guiche, in a joyous tone, — "whenever you like, and at once too. Are you ready?"

De Guiche laughingly gave his horse the rein, and galloped forward a few yards.

"One moment," said the prince. "Let us go to the château first."

"What for?"

"Why, to take my wife, of course!"

"What for?" asked De Guiche.

"Why, since I tell you that it is a project of conjugal affection, it is necessary that I should take my wife with me."

"In that case, Monseigneur," replied the count, "I am greatly concerned, but no De Guiche for you."

"Bah!"

"Yes. Why do you take Madame with you?"

"Because I begin to see that I love her," said the prince.

De Guiche turned slightly pale, but endeavored to preserve his seeming gayety.

"If you love Madame, Monseigneur," he said, "that ought to be quite enough for you, and you have no further need of your friends."

"Not bad, not bad," murmured Manicamp.

"There! your fear of Madame has begun again," replied the prince.

"Why, Monseigneur, I have experienced that to my cost, — a woman who was the cause of my being exiled!"

"What a horrible disposition you have, De Guiche! How terribly you bear malice!"

"I should like the case to be your own, Monseigneur."

"Decidedly, then, that was the reason why you danced so badly yesterday; you wished to revenge yourself, I suppose, by trying to make Madame make a mistake in

her dancing. Ah! that is very paltry, De Guiche, and I will tell Madame of it."

"You can tell her whatever you please, Monseigneur; for her Highness cannot hate me more than at present."

"Nonsense! you are exaggerating; and this merely because of the fortnight's sojourn in the country which she imposed on you."

"Monseigneur, a fortnight is a fortnight: and when the time was passed in being bored, a fortnight is an eternity!"

"So that you will not forgive her?"

"Never!"

"Come, come, De Guiche, be a better-disposed fellow than that! I wish to make your peace with her. You will find in conversing with her that she has no malice or unkindness in her nature, and that she is full of intelligence."

"Monseigneur —"

"You will see that she can receive her friends like a princess, and laugh like a citizen's wife; you will see that when she pleases she can make the hours pass away like minutes. De Guiche, my friend, you must really make up your differences with my wife."

"Upon my word," said Manicamp to himself, "here is a husband whose wife's name will bring him ill-luck; and King Candaules of old was a veritable tiger beside his royal Highness."

"At all events," added the prince, "you will make it up with my wife, De Guiche, — I am sure you will! Only, I must show you how. There is nothing commonplace about her, and it is not every one who takes her fancy."

"Monseigneur —"

"No resistance, De Guiche, or I shall get out of temper," replied the prince.

"Well, since he will have it so," murmured Manicamp in De Guiche's ear, "do as he wants you to do."

"Well, Monseigneur," said the count, "I will obey."

"And to begin," resumed the prince, "there will be cards this evening in Madame's apartment; you will dine with me, and I will take you there with me."

"Oh! as for that, Monseigneur," objected De Guiche, "you will allow me to decline."

"What! again? This is positive rebellion!"

"Madame received me too indifferently yesterday, before the whole court."

"Really!" said the prince, laughing.

"Nay; so much so, indeed, that she did not even answer me when I addressed her. It may be a good thing to be wanting in self-love; but too little is too little, as the saying is."

"Count, after dinner you will go to your own apartments and dress yourself, and then you will come to go with me. I shall wait for you."

"Since your Highness absolutely commands it —"

"Positively."

"He 'll not let go his hold," said Manicamp; "these are the things to which husbands cling most obstinately. Ah, what a pity M. Molière could not have heard this man! He would have put him into verse."

The prince and his court, chatting in this manner, returned to the coolest apartments of the château.

"By the by," said De Guiche, as they were standing by the door, "I had a commission for your royal Highness."

"Execute it, then."

"M. de Bragelonne has by the king's order set out for London, and he charged me with his respects for you, Monseigneur."

"A pleasant journey to the viscount, whom I like

very much. Go and dress yourself, De Guiche, and come back for me. If you don't come back — "

"What will happen then, Monseigneur?"

"I will get you thrown into the Bastille."

"Well," said De Guiche, laughing, "his royal Highness Monsieur is decidedly the counterpart of her royal Highness Madame: Madame gets me sent into exile because she does not care for me sufficiently, and Monsieur gets me imprisoned because he cares for me too much. I thank Monsieur, and I thank Madame."

"Come, come!" said the prince; "you are a delightful companion, and you know well that I cannot do without you. Return as soon as you can"

"Very well; but I am inclined to be a little whimsical myself, Monseigneur."

"Bah!"

"So that I will not return to your royal Highness except upon one condition."

"Name it."

"I want to oblige the friend of one of my friends."

"What 's his name?"

"Malicorne."

"An ugly name."

"But very well borne, Monseigneur."

"That may be. Well?"

"Well, I owe M. Malicorne a place in your household, Monseigneur."

"What kind of place?"

"Any kind of place, — a supervision of some sort or other, for instance."

"That happens very fortunately, for yesterday I dismissed my master of apartments."

"That will do admirably, Monseigneur. What are his duties?"

"Nothing, except to look about and make his report."

"A sort of interior police?"

"Exactly."

"Ah, how excellently that will suit Malicorne!" Manicamp ventured to say.

"You know the person of whom we are speaking, M. Manicamp?" inquired the prince.

"Intimately, Monseigneur, I am the friend in question."

"And your opinion is— "

"That your Highness will never have another master of apartments equal to him."

"How much does the appointment bring in?" inquired the count of the prince.

"I have n't the least idea; but I have always understood that he could make as much as he pleased when he was well occupied."

"What do you call being well occupied, Prince?"

"It means, of course, when the functionary in question is a man with his wits about him."

"In that case I think your Highness will be content: for Malicorne is as sharp as the Devil himself."

"Good! The appointment will be an expensive one for me in that case," replied the prince, laughing. "You are making me a positive present, Count."

"I believe so, Monseigneur."

"Well, go and announce to your M. Mélicorne—"

"Malicorne, Monseigneur."

"I shall never get hold of that name."

"You say Manicamp very well, Monseigneur."

"Oh, I shall say Manicorne very well too! Custom will help me."

"Say what you like, Monseigneur, I can promise you

that your inspector of apartments will not be annoyed; he is of the happiest disposition possible."

"Well, then, my dear De Guiche, inform him of his nomination. But, stay —"

"What is it, Monseigneur?"

"I wish to see him beforehand; if he be as ugly as his name, I retract what I have said."

"Your Highness knows him, for you have already seen him at the Palais-Royal; nay, indeed, it was I who presented him to you."

"Ah, I remember now, — not a bad-looking fellow."

"I knew that you must have noticed him, Monseigneur."

"Yes, yes, yes. You see, De Guiche, I do not wish that either my wife or myself should have ugly faces before our eyes. My wife will have all her maids of honor pretty; I, all the gentlemen about me good-looking. In this way, De Guiche, you see that any children we may have will run a good chance of being pretty; we shall have had handsome models before us."

"Most powerfully argued, Monseigneur," said Manicamp, showing his approval by look and voice at the same time.

As for De Guiche, he very probably did not find the argument so convincing; for he merely signified his opinion by a gesture, which moreover exhibited in a marked manner great indecision of mind on the subject. Manicamp went off to inform Malicorne of the good news he had just learned. De Guiche seemed very unwilling to take his departure for the purpose of making his court toilet. Monsieur, singing, laughing, and admiring himself, passed away the time until the dinner-hour in a frame of mind which would have justified the proverb, "Happy as a prince."

CHAPTER LX.

STORY OF A NAIAD AND OF A DRYAD.

EVERY one had partaken of the banquet at the château, and had afterwards dressed for the court. The usual hour for the banquet was five o'clock. If we say, then, that it occupied an hour, and the toilet two hours, it will appear that everybody was ready at about eight o'clock in the evening. Towards eight o'clock, then, the guests began to arrive at Madame's; for we have already intimated that it was Madame who "received" that evening. At Madame's *soirées* no one failed to be present; for the evenings passed in her apartments had always that perfect charm about them which the queen, that pious and excellent princess, had not been able to confer upon her assemblies. It is unfortunately one of the qualities of goodness to be less amusing than malicious wit. And yet, let us hasten to add that such a style of wit could not be attributed to Madame; for her disposition of mind, naturally of the very highest order, comprised too much true generosity, too many noble impulses and elevated thoughts, to justify any one in calling her ill-natured. But Madame was endowed with a spirit of resistance, — a gift very frequently fatal to its possessor, for he is broken where another would have bent; the result was that blows did not become deadened upon her as upon what might be termed the wadded feelings of Maria Theresa. Her heart rebounded at each attack; and like those aggressive quintains of the ring game, even if she were struck in a

manner almost to stun her, she returned blow for blow to any one who might be imprudent enough to venture to tilt against her. Was this really waywardness of disposition, or was it simply malice? We regard those rich and powerful natures as like the tree of knowledge, producing good and evil at the same time: a double branch, always blooming and fruitful, the good fruit of which is distinguished by those who hunger for it, but which yields poison for the worthless and wicked, who die of it, — a thing not to be regretted. Madame, then, who had in her mind a well-digested plan of constituting herself the second, if not even the principal queen of the court, rendered her receptions delightful to all, by the conversation, the opportunities of meeting, and the perfect liberty which she allowed to every one of making any remark he pleased, on the condition, however, that the remark was amusing or sensible. It will easily be believed that for that very reason there was less talking at Madame's than elsewhere. Madame hated loquacious people, and took a very cruel revenge upon them, for she allowed them to talk. She disliked pretension, too, and never overlooked that defect, even in the king himself. That was Monsieur's complaint, and the princess had undertaken the tremendous task of curing him of it. As for the rest, poets, wits, beautiful women, all were received by her with the air of a mistress superior to her slaves, — sufficiently meditative in her liveliest humors to make poets meditate; sufficiently pretty to dazzle by her attractions, even among the prettiest; sufficiently witty for the most distinguished persons present to listen to her with pleasure. It will be seen that such assemblies as were held in Madame's apartments must have been very attractive. All who were young flocked there; and when the king himself happens to be young, everybody at court is so

too. And so the older ladies of the court, the strong-minded women of the regency or of the last reign, pouted and sulked at their ease; but others answered these fits of sulkiness by laughing at those venerable individuals who had carried the love of authority so far as even to have taken the command of bodies of soldiers in the war of the Fronde, in order, as Madame asserted, not to lose their influence over men altogether.

As eight o'clock struck, her royal Highness entered the great drawing-room with her ladies of honor, and found several gentlemen belonging to the court already there, having been waiting for some minutes. Among those who had arrived before the hour fixed for the reception she looked around for the one who she thought ought to have been the first in attendance, but she did not find him there. However, almost at the very moment she had completed her investigation, Monsieur was announced.

Monsieur was splendid to behold. All the precious stones and jewels of Cardinal Mazarin, which of course that minister could not do otherwise than leave; all the queen-mother's jewels, as well as a few others belonging to his wife, — Monsieur wore them all, and he was as dazzling as the sun.

Behind Monsieur followed De Guiche, with hesitating steps, and with an air of contrition admirably assumed. De Guiche wore a costume of French gray velvet, embroidered with silver, and trimmed with blue ribbons, he wore also Mechlin lace, as rare and beautiful of its sort as were the jewels of Monsieur. The plume in his hat was red. Madame, too, wore several colors; she preferred red for hangings, gray for dresses, and blue for flowers. M. de Guiche, dressed as we have described, looked so handsome that he excited every one's observation. With an interesting pallor of complexion, a languid

expression of the eyes, his white hands seen through the masses of lace which covered them, the melancholy expression of his mouth, — it was only necessary, indeed, to see M. de Guiche to admit that few men at the Court of France could equal him. The consequence was that Monsieur, who was pretentious enough to fancy that he could eclipse a star even, if it should place itself in competition with him, was, on the contrary, completely eclipsed in every one's fancy, — which is a very silent judge certainly, but very positive and high in its judgment.

Madame had looked at De Guiche without expression; but vague as her look had been, it had brought a delightful color to his face. In fact, Madame had thought De Guiche so handsome and so admirably dressed that she almost ceased regretting the royal conquest which she felt was on the point of escaping her. Her heart, therefore, in spite of herself, sent the blood to her face.

Monsieur, assuming his most determined air, approached her. He had not noticed the princess's blush; or if he had seen it, he was far from attributing it to its true cause. "Madame," he said, kissing his wife's hand, "there is some one present here who has fallen into disgrace, — an unhappy exile, whom I would venture to recommend to your kindness. Do not forget, I beg, that he is one of my best friends, and that your kind reception of him will please me greatly."

"Of what exile, what disgraced person are you speaking?" inquired Madame, looking all round her and not permitting her glance to rest on the count more than on the others.

This was the moment to present his *protégé;* and the prince drew aside to let De Guiche pass him, who with a tolerably well-assumed awkwardness of manner approached Madame and made his reverence to her.

"What!" exclaimed Madame, as if she were greatly surprised; "is M. le Comte de Guiche the disgraced individual you speak of, — the exile?"

"Yes, certainly," returned the prince.

"Indeed," said Madame, "there is no one else here."

"You are unjust, Madame," said the prince.

"I?"

"Certainly. Come, forgive the poor fellow."

"Forgive him what? What have I to forgive M. de Guiche?"

"Come, explain yourself, De Guiche! What do you wish to be forgiven?" inquired the prince.

"Alas! her royal Highness knows very well what it is," replied the latter, in a hypocritical tone.

"Come, come, give him your hand, Madame!" said Philip.

"If it will give you any pleasure, Monsieur;" and with a movement of her eyes and shoulders which it would be impossible to describe, Madame extended the young man her beautiful and perfumed hand, upon which he pressed his lips.

Apparently the count lingered a little, and Madame did not withdraw her hand too quickly; for the prince added. "De Guiche is not wickedly disposed, Madame; and he certainly will not bite you."

A pretext was given in the gallery by Monsieur's remark, which was not perhaps very laughable, for every one to laugh hilariously. The situation was odd enough, and some kindly disposed persons had observed it. Monsieur was still enjoying the effect of his remark, when the king was announced.

The appearance of the room at this moment we will try to describe. In the centre, before the fireplace, which was filled with flowers, Madame was standing, with her

maids of honor formed in two wings on either side of her, around whom the butterflies of the court were fluttering. Several other groups occupied the recesses of the windows, like soldiers stationed in their different towers who belong to the same garrison; and from their respective places they could overhear the remarks which proceeded from the principal group. From one of these groups, the nearest to the fireplace, Malicorne, who had been at once, through Manicamp and De Guiche, raised to the dignity of the post of master of the apartments, and whose official costume had been ready for the last two months, was brilliant with gold lace, and shone upon Montalais, standing on Madame's extreme left, with all the fire of his eyes and all the splendor of his velvet. Madame was conversing with Mademoiselle de Châtillon and Mademoiselle de Créqui, who were next to her, and addressed a few words to Monsieur, who drew aside as soon as the king was announced. Mademoiselle de la Vallière, like Montalais, was on Madame's left hand, and the last but one on the line, Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente being on her right. She was stationed, as are certain bodies of troops whose weakness is suspected, and who are placed between two experienced regiments. Thus flanked by her two companions who had shared her adventure, La Vallière, whether from regret at Raoul's departure, or still suffering from the emotion caused by recent events which had begun to render her name familiar on the lips of the courtiers, — La Vallière, we repeat, hid her eyes, somewhat red with weeping, behind her fan, and seemed to give the greatest attention to the remarks which Montalais and Athenaïs alternately whispered to her from time to time.

As soon as the king's name was announced, a general movement took place in the drawing-room. Madame, in

her character as hostess, rose to receive the royal visitor; but as she rose, notwithstanding her preoccupation of mind, she glanced hastily towards her right. Her glance, which the presumptuous De Guiche regarded as intended for himself, rested, as it swept over the whole circle, upon La Vallière, whose vivid blush and restless emotion it immediately perceived.

The king advanced to the middle of the group, which had now become a general one by a movement that took place, of course, from the circumference to the centre. Every head bowed low before his Majesty, the ladies bending like frail and magnificent lilies before the King Aquilo. There was nothing very severe, we will even say nothing very royal, that evening about the king, except, however, his youth and good looks. He wore an air of animated joyousness and good-humor which set all imaginations at work, and thereupon all present promised themselves a delightful evening, for no other reason than the apparent desire of his Majesty to amuse himself at Madame's assembly.

If there was any one in particular whose high spirits and good-humor could equal the king's, it was M. de Saint-Aignan, who was dressed in a rose-colored costume, with face and ribbons of the same color, — particularly rose-colored in his ideas, for that evening M. de Saint-Aignan was prolific in ideas. The circumstance which had given a new expansion to the numerous schemes germinating in his cheerful mind was that he had just perceived that Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente was, like himself, dressed in rose-color. We would not wish to say, however, that the wily courtier had not known beforehand that the beautiful Athenaïs was to wear that particular color; for he very well knew the art of unlocking the lips of a dressmaker or maid as to her

mistress's intentions. He cast as many killing glances at Mademoiselle Athenais as he had bows of ribbon on his hose and doublet, — in other words, an immense number.

The king having paid Madame the customary compliments, and Madame having requested him to be seated, the circle was immediately formed. Louis inquired of Monsieur the particulars of the day's bathing; and stated, looking at the ladies while he spoke, that certain poets were engaged in turning into verse the enchanting diversion of the baths of Valvins, and that one of them particularly, M. Loret, seemed to have been intrusted with the confidence of some water-nymph, as he had in his verses recounted many circumstances that were actually true, — at which remark more than one lady present felt herself bound to blush. The king at this moment took the opportunity of looking round him more leisurely. Montalais was the only one who did not blush sufficiently to prevent her looking at the king, and she saw him fix his eyes most devouringly upon Mademoiselle de la Vallière. This undaunted maid of honor, Mademoiselle de Montalais, be it understood, forced the king to lower his gaze, and so saved Louise de la Vallière from a sympathetic warmth of feeling which this gaze might possibly have awakened. Louis was appropriated by Madame, who overwhelmed him with inquiries, — and no one in the world knew how to ask questions better than she. He tried, however, to render the conversation general, and with the view of effecting this he redoubled his wit and his devotion to her.

Madame coveted complimentary remarks, and determined to procure them at any cost, she addressed herself to the king, saying, "Sire, your Majesty, who is aware of everything which occurs in your kingdom, ought to know

beforehand the verses confided to M. Loret by this nymph; will your Majesty kindly communicate them to us?"

"Madame," replied the king, with perfect grace of manner, "I dare not, — you, personally, might be in no little degree confused at having to listen to certain details. But De Saint Aignan tells a story tolerably well, and has a perfect recollection of the verses; if he does not remember them, he will invent. I can certify him to be almost a poet himself."

De Saint-Aignan, thus brought prominently forward, was compelled to introduce himself as advantageously as possible. Unfortunately, however, for Madame, he thought of his own personal affairs only; in other words, instead of paying Madame the compliments which she so much desired and relished, his mind was fixed upon making as much display as possible of his own good fortune. Again glancing, therefore, for the hundredth time at the beautiful Athenaïs, who put into practice her theory of the previous evening, — that is, did not deign to look at her adorer, — he said, "Sire, your Majesty will perhaps pardon me for having too indifferently remembered the verses which the nymph dictated to Loret; but if the king has not retained any recollection of them, what could I possibly remember?"

Madame did not receive this shortcoming of the courtier very favorably.

"Ah! Madame," added De Saint-Aignan, "at present it is no longer a question what the water-nymphs have to say; and one would almost be tempted to believe that nothing of any interest now occurs in those liquid realms. It is upon the earth, Madame, that important events happen. Ah! Madame, upon the earth how many tales there are full of —"

"Well," said Madame, "and what is taking place upon the earth?"

"That question must be asked of the dryads," replied the count; "the dryads inhabit the forests, as your royal Highness is aware."

"I am aware, also, that they are naturally very talkative, M. de Saint-Aignan."

"Such is the case, Madame; but when they say only delightful things, it would be ungracious to accuse them of being too talkative."

"Do they talk so delightfully, then?" inquired the princess, indifferently. "Really, M. de Saint-Aignan, you excite my curiosity; and if I were the king, I would require you immediately to tell us what the delightful things are which these dryads have been saying, since you alone seem to understand their language."

"I am perfectly at his Majesty's orders, Madame, in that respect," replied the count, quickly.

"What a fortunate fellow this Saint-Aignan is, to understand the language of the dryads!" said Monsieur.

"I understand it perfectly, Monseigneur, as I do my own language."

"Tell us all about them, then," said Madame.

The king felt embarrassed; for his confidant was in all probability about to launch forth upon a delicate subject. He foresaw it in the general attention excited by De Saint-Aignan's preamble, and aroused too by Madame's peculiar manner. The most reserved of those who were present seemed ready to devour every syllable the count was about to pronounce. They coughed, drew closer together, looked curiously at certain of the maids of honor, who in order to support with greater propriety or with more steadiness the fixity of the inquisitorial looks bent upon them adjusted their fans accordingly,

and assumed the bearing of a duellist who is about to be exposed to his adversary's fire.

At this epoch the fashion of ingeniously constructed discourse and hazardously dangerous recitals so prevailed that at the point where in modern times a whole company assembled in a drawing-room would begin to suspect some scandal or disclosure or tragic event and would hurry away in dismay, Madame's guests quietly settled themselves in their places, in order not to lose a word or gesture of the comedy composed by M. de Saint-Aignan for their benefit, the *dénouement* of which, whatever the style and the plot might be, must as a matter of course be marked by the most perfect propriety. The count was known as a man of extreme refinement and an admirable narrator. He courageously began, then, amid a profound silence which would have been formidable to any one but himself: —

"Madame, by the king's permission, I address myself, in the first place, to your royal Highness, since you admit yourself to be the person present possessing the greatest curiosity. I have the honor, therefore, to inform your royal Highness that the dryad more particularly inhabits the hollows of oaks; and as dryads are mythological creatures of great beauty, they inhabit the most beautiful trees, — in other words, the largest to be found."

At this exordium, which recalled under a transparent veil the celebrated story of the royal oak which had played so important a part in the last evening, so many hearts began to beat, both from mirth and uneasiness, that if De Saint-Aignan had not had a good and sonorous voice, their throbbings might have been heard above the sound of his voice.

"There must surely be dryads at Fontainebleau, then,"

said Madame, in a perfectly calm voice; "for I have never in all my life seen finer oaks than in the royal park;" and as she spoke, she directed towards De Guiche a look of which he had no reason to complain, as he had of the one that preceded it, — which, as we have already mentioned, had a character of indefiniteness most painful to so loving a heart as his.

"Precisely, Madame; it is of Fontainebleau that I was about to speak to your royal Highness," said De Saint-Aignan; "for the dryad whose story is engaging our attention lives in the park belonging to the château of his Majesty."

The narrative was fairly entered upon; the action was begun, and it was no longer possible for audience or narrator to draw back.

"It will be worth listening to," said Madame; "for the story not only appears to me to have all the charm of a national incident, but still more seems to be a circumstance of very recent occurrence."

"I ought to begin at the beginning," said the count. "In the first place, then, there live at Fontainebleau, in a fine-appearing cottage, two shepherds. The one is the shepherd Tyrcis, the owner of extensive domains transmitted to him from his parents by right of inheritance. Tyrcis is young and handsome, and his many qualifications make him the first and foremost among the shepherds in the whole country; one might even boldly say that he is the king of them." A subdued murmur of approbation encouraged the narrator, who continued: "His strength equals his courage; no one displays greater address in hunting wild beasts, nor greater wisdom in matters where judgment is required. Whenever he mounts and exercises his horse on the beautiful plains of his inheritance, or whenever he joins with the shep-

herds who owe him allegiance, in different games of skill and strength, one might say that it is the god Mars darting his lance on the plains of Thrace, or, even better, that it is Apollo himself, the god of day, radiant upon earth, bearing his flaming darts in his hand."

Every one understood that this allegorical portrait of the king was not the worst exordium that the narrator could have chosen; and it did not fail to produce its effect, either upon the audience, which from duty or inclination applauded it to the very echo, or upon the king himself, to whom flattery was very agreeable when delicately conveyed, and whom indeed it did not always displease even when it was a little too broad.

De Saint-Aignan then continued: "It is not in games of glory only, ladies, that the shepherd Tyrcis has acquired that reputation by which he is regarded as the king of shepherds."

"Of the shepherds of Fontainebleau," said the king, smilingly, to Madame.

"Oh!" exclaimed Madame, "Fontainebleau is selected arbitrarily by the poet; but I should say, of the shepherds of the whole world."

The king forgot his part of a passive auditor, and bowed.

"It is," pursued De Saint-Aignan, amid a flattering murmur of applause, — "it is, above all, with the fair that the qualities of this king of the shepherds are most prominently displayed. He is a shepherd with a mind as refined as his heart is pure; he can pay a compliment with a charm of manner whose fascination it is impossible to resist; and in his attachments he is so discreet that his lovely and happy conquests may regard their lot as more than enviable. Never a syllable of disclosure, never a moment's forgetfulness! Whoever has seen and

heard Tyrcis must love him; whoever loves and is beloved by him, has indeed found happiness."

De Saint-Aignan here paused. He was enjoying the pleasures of his own compliments; and the portrait he had drawn, however grotesquely inflated it might be, had found favor in certain ears, for whom the perfections of the shepherd did not seem to have been exaggerated.

Madame begged the orator to continue.

"Tyrcis," said the count, "had a faithful companion, or rather a devoted servant, whose name was — Amyntas."

"Ah!" said Madame, archly, "now for the portrait of Amyntas; you are such an excellent painter, M. de Saint-Aignan."

"Madame —"

"Oh, Comte de Saint-Aignan, do not, I entreat you, sacrifice poor Amyntas! I should never forgive you."

"Madame, Amyntas is of too humble a position, particularly beside Tyrcis, for his person to be honored by a parallel. There are certain friends who resemble those servants of ancient times who suffered themselves to be buried alive at their masters' feet. Amyntas's place, too, is at the feet of Tyrcis. He cares for no other; and if sometimes the illustrious hero —"

"Illustrious shepherd, do you mean?" said Madame, pretending to correct M. de Saint-Aignan.

"Your royal Highness is right; I made a mistake," returned the courtier. "If, I say, the shepherd Tyrcis deigns occasionally to call Amyntas his friend and to open his heart to him, it is an unparalleled favor, which the latter regards as the most unbounded felicity."

"All that you say," interrupted Madame, "establishes the extreme devotion of Amyntas to Tyrcis, but does not furnish us with the portrait of Amyntas. Count, do not

flatter him, if you like; but describe him to us. I will have Amyntas's portrait."

De Saint-Aignan obeyed, after having bowed profoundly to his Majesty's sister-in-law. "Amyntas," he said, "is somewhat older than Tyrcis. He is not an altogether ill-favored shepherd; it is even said that the Muses condescended to smile upon him at his birth, even as Hebe smiled upon youth. He is not ambitious to shine, but he is ambitious of being loved; and he might not perhaps be found unworthy of it, if he were only sufficiently well-known."

This latter sentence, strengthened by a very killing glance, was directed straight to Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, who met the shock unmoved. But the modesty and tact of the allusion had produced a good effect. Amyntas reaped the benefit of it in the applause bestowed on him; Tyrcis's head had even given the signal for it by a consenting nod full of good-will.

"One evening," continued De Saint-Aignan, "Tyrcis and Amyntas were walking together in the forest, talking of their love disappointments. Do not forget, ladies, that the story of the dryad is now beginning; otherwise it would be easy to tell you what Tyrcis and Amyntas, the two most discreet shepherds of the whole earth, were talking about. They had reached the thickest part of the forest for the purpose of being quite alone and of confiding their troubles more freely to each other, when suddenly the sound of voices struck upon their ears."

"Ah, ah!" said those who surrounded the narrator. "Nothing can be more interesting than this."

At this point Madame, like a vigilant general inspecting his army, glanced at Montalais and Tonnay-Charente, who were drooping under the strain.

"These harmonious voices," resumed De Saint-Aignan,

"were those of certain shepherdesses, who had been likewise desirous of enjoying the coolness of the shade, and who, knowing the isolated and almost unapproachable situation of the place, had betaken themselves thither to interchange their ideas upon the sheepfold."

A loud burst of laughter, occasioned by this remark of De Saint-Aignan, and an imperceptible smile of the king as he looked at Tonnay-Charente, followed this sally.

"The dryad affirms positively," continued De Saint-Aignan, "that the shepherdesses were three in number, and that all were young and beautiful."

"What were their names?" said Madame, quietly.

"Their names?" said De Saint-Aignan, who hesitated from the fear of committing an indiscretion.

"Of course! You called your shepherds Tyrcis and Amyntas; give your shepherdesses names in a similar manner."

"Oh, Madame, I am not an inventor, an improvisator; I relate simply what took place, as the dryad related it to me."

"What did your dryad, then, call these shepherdesses? You have a very treacherous memory, I fear. This dryad must have fallen out with the goddess Mnemosyne."

"These shepherdesses, Madame — Pray remember that it is a crime to betray a woman's name."

"From which a woman absolves you, Count, on condition that you reveal the names of the shepherdesses."

"Their names were Phyllis, Amaryllis, and Galatea."

"Very well; they have not lost by the delay," said Madame, "for we have three charming names. But now for their portraits."

De Saint-Aignan again started.

"Nay, Count, let us proceed in due order," returned

Madame. "Ought we not, Sire, to have the portraits of the shepherdesses?"

The king, who expected this determined perseverance and who began to feel some uneasiness, did not think it safe to provoke so dangerous an interrogator. He thought, too, that De Saint-Aignan in drawing the portraits would find a means of insinuating some flattering allusions which would be agreeable to the ears of one whom his Majesty was interested in pleasing. It was with this hope and with this fear that Louis authorized De Saint-Aignan to sketch the portraits of the shepherdesses, — Phyllis, Amaryllis, and Galatea.

"Very well, then, be it so," said De Saint-Aignan, like a man who has made up his mind; and he began.

CHAPTER LXI.

CONCLUSION OF THE STORY OF A NAIAD AND OF A DRYAD.

"PHYLLIS," said De Saint Aignan, with a glance of defiance at Montalais, such as a fencing-master would give who invites an antagonist worthy of him to place himself on his guard, — "Phyllis is neither fair nor dark, neither tall nor short, neither too grave nor too gay; though but a shepherdess, she is as witty as a princess and as coquettish as a demon. Nothing can equal her excellent vision. Her heart yearns for everything that her gaze embraces. She is like a bird which, always warbling, at one moment skims along the grass, at the next rises fluttering in pursuit of a butterfly, then perches upon the topmost branch of a tree, where it defies the bird-catchers either to come and seize it or to entice it into their nets."

The portrait bore such a strong resemblance to Montalais that all eyes were directed towards her. She, however, with her head raised and with a steady unmoved look, listened to M. de Saint-Aignan as if he were speaking of some one who was a complete stranger to her.

"Is that all, M. de Saint-Aignan?" inquired the princess.

"Oh, your royal Highness, the portrait is a mere sketch, and many additions could be made; but I am afraid of wearying your Highness's patience, or offending the modesty of the shepherdess, and I shall therefore pass on to her companion, Amaryllis."

"Very well," said Madame, "pass on to Amaryllis, M. de Saint-Aignan; we are all attention."

"Amaryllis is the eldest of the three, and yet," De Saint-Aignan hastened to add, "this advanced age does not reach twenty years."

Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, who had slightly knitted her brows at the beginning of the description, unbent them with a faint smile.

"She is tall, with an immense quantity of hair, which she dresses in the manner of the Grecian statues. Her walk is full of majesty, her attitude haughty. She has the air, therefore, of a goddess rather than of a mere mortal; and among the goddesses she most resembles Diana the huntress, — with this sole difference, however, that the cruel shepherdess, having one day stolen the quiver of Love while poor Cupid was sleeping in a thicket of roses, instead of directing her arrows against the denizens of the forest, discharges them most pitilessly against all the poor shepherds who pass within reach of her bow."

"Oh, what a wicked shepherdess!" said Madame. "She may some day wound herself with one of those arrows which she discharges, as you say, so mercilessly on all sides."

"It is the hope of all the shepherds in general," said De Saint-Aignan.

"And that of the shepherd Amyntas in particular, I suppose?" said Madame.

"The shepherd Amyntas is so timid," returned De Saint-Aignan, with the most modest air he could assume, "that if he cherishes such a hope as that, no one has ever known anything about it, for he conceals it in the very depths of his heart." A flattering murmur of applause greeted the narrator's profession of faith on the part of the shepherd.

"And Galatea?" inquired Madame. "I am impatient to see a hand so skilful as yours continue the portrait where Virgil left it, and finish it before our eyes."

"Madame," said De Saint-Aignan, "beside the great Virgilius Maro your humble servant is indeed but a very poor poet. Still, encouraged by your desire, I will do my best."

De Saint-Aignan extended his foot and his hand, and gave the following florid description: "White as milk, she casts upon the breeze the perfume of her fair hair, tinged with golden hues, as are the ears of corn. One is tempted to inquire if she is not the beautiful Europa, who inspired Jupiter with the tender passion as she played with her companions in the flower-bespangled meadows. From her eyes, blue as the azure heavens in the brightest summer day, emanates a tender light, which reverie feeds and which love dispenses. When she frowns, or bends her looks towards the ground, the sun is veiled in token of mourning. When she smiles, on the contrary, Nature resumes her joyousness; and the birds, which had for a moment been silenced, recommence their songs amid the leafy covert of the trees. Galatea,' said De Saint-Aignan, in conclusion, "is worthy of the adoration of the whole world; and if she should ever bestow her heart upon another, happy will that mortal be whom by the gift of her virgin affections she condescends to make immortal."

Madame, who had attentively listened to the portrait De Saint-Aignan had drawn, as indeed had all the others, contented herself by indicating her approbation of the most poetic passages by occasional inclinations of her head; but it was impossible to say whether these marks of assent had been accorded to the ability of the narrator or to the likeness of the portrait. The consequence, therefore, was that as Madame did not openly exhibit any

approbation no one felt authorized to applaud, — not even Monsieur, who secretly thought that De Saint-Aignan dwelt too much upon the portraits of the shepherdesses after having somewhat slightingly passed over the portraits of the shepherds. The whole assembly seemed suddenly chilled. De Saint-Aignan, who had exhausted his rhetorical skill and his artist's brush in sketching the portrait of Galatea, and who, after the favor with which his other descriptions had been received, already imagined he could hear the loud applause for this last one, was himself more chilled than the king and the rest of the company.

A moment's silence followed, which was at last broken by Madame. "Well, Sire," she inquired, "what is your Majesty's opinion of these three portraits?"

The king, who wished to relieve De Saint-Aignan's embarrassment without compromising himself, replied, "Why, Amaryllis, in my opinion, is beautiful."

"For my part," said Monsieur, "I like Phyllis better; she is a capital girl, or rather a good-sort-of-fellow of a nymph."

A general laugh followed; and this time the looks were so direct that Montalais felt herself blushing almost scarlet.

"Well," resumed Madame, "what were those shepherdesses saying to one another?"

De Saint-Aignan, however, whose vanity had been wounded, did not feel himself in a position to sustain an attack of new and refreshed troops, and merely said, "Madame, the shepherdesses were confiding to one another their little preferences."

"Nay, nay! M. de Saint-Aignan, you are a perfect stream of pastoral poesy," said Madame, with an amiable smile, which somewhat comforted the narrator.

"They confessed that love is a great peril, but that the absence of love is the heart's sentence of death."

"What was the conclusion they came to?" inquired Madame.

"They came to the conclusion that one ought to love."

"Very good! Did they lay down any conditions?"

"That of choice, simply," said De Saint-Aignan. "I ought even to add — remember it is the dryad who is speaking — that one of the shepherdesses (Amaryllis, I believe) was completely opposed to the necessity of loving, and yet she did not positively deny that she had allowed the image of a certain shepherd to be impressed upon her heart."

"Was it Amyntas or Tyrcis?"

"Amyntas, Madame," said De Saint-Aignan, modestly. "But Galatea — the gentle and soft-eyed Galatea — immediately replied that neither Amyntas nor Alphesibœus nor Tityrus, nor indeed any of the handsomest shepherds of the country, were to be compared to Tyrcis; that Tyrcis was as superior to all other men as the oak in its grandeur to all other trees, as the lily in its majesty to all other flowers. She even drew such a portrait of Tyrcis that Tyrcis himself, who was listening, must have felt truly flattered by it, notwithstanding his rank and position. Thus Tyrcis and Amyntas had been distinguished by Amaryllis and Galatea; and thus had the secrets of two hearts been revealed beneath the shades of evening and amid the recesses of the woods. Such, Madame, is what the dryad related to me, — she who knows all that takes place in the hollows of oaks and in grassy dells; she who knows the loves of the birds, and all they wish to convey by their songs; she who understands, in fact, the language of the wind

among the branches, the humming of the insects with their golden and emerald wings in the corolla of the wild-flowers; — it was she who related the particulars to me, and I repeat them."

"And now you have finished, M. de Saint-Aignan, have you not?" said Madame, with a smile which made the king tremble.

"Quite finished," replied De Saint-Aignan, "and only too happy if I have been able to amuse your Highness for a few moments."

"Moments which have been too brief," replied the princess, "for you have related most admirably all you knew; but, my dear M. de Saint-Aignan, you have been unfortunate enough to obtain your information from one dryad only, I believe?"

"Yes, Madame, only from one, I confess."

"The fact was that you passed by a little naiad, who pretended to know nothing at all, and yet knew a great deal more than your dryad, my dear count."

"A naiad!" repeated several voices, the expectation being aroused that the story was going to have a continuation.

"Of course! Close beside the oak of which you were speaking, which, if I am not mistaken, is called the royal oak — Is it not so, M. de Saint-Aignan?"

De Saint-Aignan and the king exchanged glances.

"Yes, Madame," the former replied.

"Well, close beside the oak there is a pretty little spring, which runs murmuringly on over the pebbles, amid the forget-me-nots and daisies."

"I believe you are correct," said the king, still with some uneasiness, and listening eagerly to his sister-in-law's narrative.

"Oh, there is one, I can assure you!" said Madame;

"and the proof of it is that the naiad who rules over that little stream stopped me as I was about to cross."

"Bah!" said De Saint-Aignan.

"Yes, indeed," continued the princess; "and she did so in order to communicate to me many particulars which M. de Saint-Aignan omitted in his recital."

"Pray relate them yourself," said Monsieur; "you can relate stories in such a charming manner"

The princess bowed at the conjugal compliment paid her. "I do not possess the poetical powers of the count, nor his ability to bring out all the details."

"You will not be listened to with less interest on that account," said the king, already perceiving that something hostile was intended in his sister-in-law's story.

"I speak, too," continued Madame, "in the name of that poor little naiad, who is indeed the most charming creature I ever met. Moreover, she laughed so heartily while she was telling me her story, that, in pursuance of that medical axiom that laughter is contagious, I ask permission to laugh a little myself when I recollect her words."

The king and De Saint-Aignan, who noticed spreading over many faces a beginning of the laughter which Madame announced, finished by looking at each other, as if asking whether there were not some little conspiracy concealed beneath her words. But Madame was determined to turn the knife in the wound over and over again; she therefore resumed with an air of the most perfect innocence, — in other words, with the most dangerous of all her airs, — "Well, then, I passed that way; and as I found beneath my steps many fresh flowers newly blown, no doubt Phyllis, Amaryllis, Galatea, and all your shepherdesses had passed the same way before me."

The king bit his lips, for the recital was becoming more and more threatening. "My little naiad," continued Madame, "was murmuring her plaintive little song in the bed of her rivulet. As I perceived that she accosted me by touching the hem of my robe, I did not think of receiving her advances ungraciously; and more particularly so since, after all, a divinity, even though of inferior rank, is always of greater importance than a mortal, though a princess. I thereupon accosted the naiad; and bursting into laughter, this is what she said to me, 'Fancy, Princess —' You understand, Sire, it is the naiad who is speaking."

The king bowed assentingly; and Madame resumed: "'Fancy, Princess, the banks of my little stream have just witnessed a most amusing scene. Two shepherds full of curiosity, even indiscreetly so, have allowed themselves to be mystified in the merriest manner by three nymphs or three shepherdesses.' I beg your pardon, but I do not now remember if it were nymphs or shepherdesses she said; but it does not much matter, so we will continue."

The king at this opening colored visibly; and De Saint-Aignan, completely losing countenance, began to open his eyes in the greatest possible anxiety.

"'The two shepherds,' pursued my little naiad, still laughing, 'followed in the wake of the three young ladies,' — no, I mean, of the three nymphs; forgive me, I ought to say, of the three shepherdesses. It is not always wise to do that, for it may be awkward for those who are followed. I appeal to all the ladies present; and not one of them, I am sure, will contradict me."

The king, who was much disturbed by what he suspected was about to follow, signified his assent by a gesture.

"'But,' continued the naiad, 'the shepherdesses had noticed Tyrcis and Amyntas gliding into the wood, and by the light of the moon they had recognized them through the grove of trees.' Ah, you laugh!" interrupted Madame; "wait, you are not yet at the end."

The king turned pale. De Saint-Aignan wiped his forehead, which was bedewed with perspiration. Among the groups of ladies could be heard smothered laughter and stealthy whispers.

"'The shepherdesses, I was saying, noticing how indiscreet the two shepherds were, proceeded to sit down at the foot of the royal oak; and when they perceived that their indiscreet listeners were sufficiently near, so that not a syllable of what they were about to say could be lost, they made to them very innocently, in the most innocent manner in the world indeed, a passionate declaration, which from the vanity natural to all men, and even to the most sentimental of shepherds, seemed to the two listeners as sweet as the honeycomb.'"

The king at these words, which the assembly was unable to hear without laughing, could not restrain a flash of anger darting from his eyes. As for De Saint-Aignan, he let his head fall upon his breast, and concealed under a bitter laugh the extreme annoyance he felt.

"Oh," said the king, drawing himself up to his full height, "upon my word, that is a most amusing jest certainly, and as told by you, Madame, has lost none of its charm; but really and truly, are you sure you quite understood the language of the naiads?"

"The count, Sire, pretends to have perfectly understood that of the dryads," retorted Madame, spiritedly.

"No doubt," said the king. "But you know the count has the weakness to aspire to become a member of the Academy; so that, with this object in view, he has learned

all sorts of things of which very happily you are ignorant; and it might possibly happen that the language of the nymph of the waters might be among the number of things which you have not studied."

"You know, Sire," replied Madame, "that for facts of that nature one does not altogether rely upon one's self alone; a woman's ear is not infallible, so says Saint Augustine. I therefore wished to satisfy myself by other opinions besides my own; and as my naiad, who in her character of a goddess is polyglot — Is not that the expression, M. de Saint-Aignan?"

"Yes," said the latter, quite out of countenance.

"Well," continued the princess, "as my naiad in her character of goddess had at first spoken to me in English. I feared, as you suggest, that I might have misunderstood her; and I requested Mesdemoiselles de Montalais, de Tonnay-Charente, and de la Vallière to come to me, begging my naiad to repeat to me in the French language the recital she had already communicated to me in English."

"And did she do so?" inquired the king.

"Oh, she is the most obliging divinity that exists! Yes, Sire, she did so; so that no doubt whatever remains on the subject. Is it not so, Mesdemoiselles?" said the princess, turning towards the left of her army; "did not the naiad say precisely what I have related, and have I in any one particular exceeded the truth? Phyllis, — I beg your pardon, I mean Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais, — is it true?"

"Oh, precisely, Madame!" articulated Mademoiselle de Montalais, very distinctly.

"Is it true, Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente?"

"The perfect truth," replied Athenaïs, in a voice quite as firm, but yet not so distinct.

"And you, La Vallière?" asked Madame.

The poor girl felt the king's ardent look fixed upon her; she dared not deny it, she dared not tell a falsehood, and so bowed her head simply in token of assent. Her head, however, was not raised again, half chilled as she was by a coldness more bitter than that of death.

This triple testimony overwhelmed the king. As for De Saint-Aignan, he did not even attempt to dissemble his despair, and hardly knowing what he said, stammered out, "An excellent jest! admirably played, Mesdemoiselles shepherdesses."

"A just punishment for curiosity," said the king, in a hoarse voice. "Oh! who would think, after the chastisement that Tyrcis and Amyntas suffered, of endeavoring to surprise what is passing in the heart of shepherdesses! Assuredly, I shall not, for one; and you, Messieurs!"

"Nor I! nor I!" repeated, in a chorus, the group of courtiers.

Madame was filled with triumph at the king's annoyance; and was full of delight, thinking that her story had been, or was to be, the termination of the whole matter.

As for Monsieur, who had laughed at the two stories without comprehending anything about them, he turned towards De Guiche, and said to him, "Well, Count, you say nothing; can you not find something to say? Do you pity M. Tyrcis and M. Amyntas, perchance?"

"I pity them with all my soul," replied De Guiche; "for, in very truth, love is so sweet a fancy that to lose it, fancy though it may be, is to lose more than life itself. If, therefore, these two shepherds thought themselves beloved, — if they were happy in that idea, and if instead of that happiness they meet with not only that empty void which resembles death, but with jeers and jests at that love, which is worse than a hundred thousand

deaths, — in that case I say that Tyrcis and Amyntas are the two most unhappy men I know."

"And you are right, too, M. de Guiche," said the king; "for, in fact, the death we speak of is a very hard return for a little curiosity."

"That is as much as to say, then, that the story of my naiad has displeased the king?" asked Madame, innocently.

"Nay, Madame, undeceive yourself," said Louis, taking the princess by the hand. "Your naiad, on the contrary, has pleased me; and the more so, because she has been more truthful, and because her tale, I ought to add, is confirmed by the testimony of unimpeachable witnesses."

These words fell upon La Vallière accompanied by a look that no one, from Socrates to Montaigne, could have exactly defined. The look and the words succeeded in overpowering the unhappy girl, who with her head upon Montalais's shoulder seemed to have fainted away. The king rose without remarking this circumstance, of which no one moreover took any notice; and contrary to his usual custom, for generally he remained late in Madame's apartments, he took his leave, and retired to his own side of the palace. De Saint-Aignan followed him, leaving the rooms in as great a state of despair as he had entered them in a state of delight. Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, less sensitive to emotion than La Vallière, was not much frightened, and did not faint. However, the last look of De Saint-Aignan had hardly been so majestic as the last look of the king.

CHAPTER LXII.

ROYAL PSYCHOLOGY.

The king returned to his apartments with hurried steps. The reason he walked as fast as he did was probably to avoid tottering in his gait. He seemed to leave behind him as he went along a trace of a mysterious sorrow. That gayety of manner which every one had remarked in him on his arrival, and which all had been delighted to perceive, had not perhaps been understood in its true sense; but his stormy departure, his disordered countenance, all knew, or at least thought they could easily comprehend. Madame's levity of manner, her pleasantries, — somewhat rough for any one, especially so for a king, — and the too familiar identification of the king with an ordinary man were among the reasons which the assembly assigned for the precipitate and unexpected departure of Louis XIV.

Madame, keen-sighted enough in other respects, did not, however, at first see anything extraordinary in it. It was quite sufficient for her to have inflicted some slight wound upon the vanity or self-esteem of one who, so soon forgetting the engagements he had contracted, seemed to have undertaken to disdain without cause the noblest and highest prizes. It was not an unimportant matter for her, in the present position of affairs, to let the king perceive the difference which existed between the bestowal of his affections on one in a high station and

the running after some passing fancy, like a younger son fresh from the provinces. By indulging in amours of the higher class, having in view their dignity and power, and preserving in them a certain formality and ostentation, a monarch not only did not act in a manner derogatory to his high position, but found even a repose, security, mystery, and general respect therein. On the contrary, in the debasement of vulgar intrigues, he would encounter, even among his meanest subjects, carping and sarcastic remarks; he would forfeit his character of infallibility and inviolability. Having descended to the region of petty human miseries, he would be subjected to its paltry contentions. In a word, to convert the royal divinity into a mere mortal by striking at his heart, or rather even at his face, like the meanest of his subjects, was to inflict a terrible blow upon the pride of that generous nature. Louis was more easily captivated by vanity than by love. Madame had wisely calculated her vengeance, and, as has been seen, she obtained it.

Let it not be supposed, however, that Madame possessed such terrible passions as the heroines of the Middle Ages possessed, or that she regarded things from a serious point of view; on the contrary, Madame, young, amiable, of cultivated intellect, coquettish, loving in her nature, — but rather from fancy or imagination or ambition than from her heart, — Madame, we say, on the contrary, inaugurated that epoch of light and fleeting amusements which distinguished the hundred and twenty years that intervened between the middle of the seventeenth century and the last quarter of the eighteenth. Madame saw, therefore, or rather fancied that she saw, things under their true aspect. She knew that the king, her august brother-in-law, had been the first to ridicule the humble La Vallière, and that, in accordance with his usual cus-

tom, it was hardly probable he would ever love the person who had excited his laughter, even had it been only for a moment. Moreover, was not her vanity present, — that evil influence which plays so important a part in that comedy of dramatic incidents called the life of a woman? Did not her vanity tell her, aloud, in a subdued voice, in a whisper, in every variety of tone, that she could not, in reality, — she a princess, young, beautiful, and rich, — be compared with the poor La Vallière, as youthful as herself, it is true, but far less pretty certainly, and utterly poor? And there is nothing surprising in this: for it is known that the greatest characters are those who flatter themselves the most in the comparison they draw between themselves and others, between others and themselves.

It may perhaps be asked, What was Madame's motive for an attack which had been so skilfully combined? Why was there such a display of forces, if it were not seriously the intention to dislodge the king from a heart that had never been occupied before, in which he seemed disposed to take refuge? Was there any necessity, then, for Madame to attach so great an importance to La Vallière, if she did not fear her? No; Madame did not regard La Vallière from that point of view in which an historian, who knows everything, sees into the future, or rather the past. Madame was neither a prophetess nor a sibyl; nor could she, any more than another, read what was written in that terrible and fatal book of the future, which guards in its most secret pages the most serious events. No; Madame desired simply to punish the king for having availed himself of secret means altogether feminine in their nature. She wished to prove to him clearly that if he made use of offensive weapons of that nature, she, a woman of ready wit and high descent, would assuredly discover, in the arsenal of her imagina

tion, defensive weapons proof even against the thrusts of a monarch. Moreover, she wished him to learn that in a warfare of that description kings are held of no account, or, at all events, that kings who fight on their own behalf, like ordinary individuals, may witness the fall of their crown in the first encounter; and that, in fact, if he had expected to be adored by all the ladies of the court from the very first, from a confident reliance on his mere appearance, it was a pretension which was most preposterous, and insulting even towards certain persons who filled a higher position than others; and that a lesson taught in season to this royal personage, who assumed too high and haughty a carriage, would be rendering him a great service.

Such, indeed, were Madame's reflections with respect to the king. The event itself was not thought of. And with this purpose it has been seen that she had exercised her influence over the minds of her maids of honor, and with all its accompanying details had arranged the comedy which had just been acted. The king was completely bewildered by it; for the first time since he had escaped from the trammels of M. de Mazarin, he found himself treated as a man. A similar severity from any of his subjects would have been at once resisted by him. *Les pouvoirs croissent dans la lutte.* But to attack women, to be attacked by them, to have been imposed upon by mere girls from the country, who had come from Blois expressly for that purpose, — it was the depth of dishonor for a young sovereign full of that vanity with which his personal advantages and his royal power inspired him. There was nothing he could do; he could resort neither to reproaches nor exile, nor could he show the annoyance he felt. To show any vexation would have been to admit that he had been touched, like Hamlet, by a

sword from which the button had been removed, — the sword of ridicule. To show vexation towards women, what humiliation! — especially when the women in question have laughter on their side as a means of vengeance. Oh! if instead of leaving all the responsibility of the affair to these women, one of the courtiers had had anything to do with the intrigue, how delightedly would Louis XIV. have seized the opportunity of turning the Bastille to account! But there again the king's anger paused, checked by reason. To be the master of armies, of prisons, of an almost divine authority, and to exert that almost almighty power in the service of a petty grudge, would be unworthy not only of a monarch, but even of a man.

It was necessary, therefore, simply to swallow the affront in silence, and to wear his usual gentleness and graciousness of expression. It was necessary to treat Madame as a friend. As a friend! — and why not? Either Madame had been the instigator of the affair, or the affair itself had found her passive. If she had been the instigator of it, it certainly was a bold measure on her part; but, at all events, it was only natural in her. Who was it that had sought her in the earliest moments of her honeymoon, to whisper words of love in her ear? Who was it that had dared to calculate the possibility of committing a crime against the marriage vow, — a crime, too, still more deplorable on account of the relationship between them? Who was it that, shielded behind his royal omnipotence, had said to this young woman, "Be not afraid; love but the King of France, who is above all, and a movement of whose sceptred hand will protect you against all attacks, even from your own remorse"? And she had listened to and obeyed the royal voice, had been influenced by his ensnaring tones; and now that she had,

morally speaking, sacrificed her honor in listening to him, she saw herself repaid for her sacrifice by an infidelity the more humiliating, since it was occasioned by a woman far beneath her own station, — she who at first had thought that she was beloved.

Had Madame, therefore, been the instigator of the revenge, she would have been right. If, on the contrary, she had remained passive in the whole affair, what grounds had the king to be angry with her on that account? Was it for her to restrain, or rather could she restrain, the chattering of a few country girls; and was it for her, by an excess of zeal which might have been misinterpreted, to check, at the risk of increasing it, the impertinence of their conduct? All these various reasonings were like so many actual stings to the king's pride; but when he had carefully in his own mind gone over all his causes for complaint, Louis XIV. was surprised, upon due reflection, — in other words, after the wound had been dressed, — to find that there were other causes of suffering, secret, unendurable, and unrevealed. There was one circumstance which he dared not confess even to himself; namely, that the acute pain from which he was suffering had its seat in his heart. The fact is, he had permitted his heart to be gratified by La Vallière's innocent confession. He had dreamed of a pure affection, — of an affection for Louis the man, and not the sovereign, — of an affection free from all self-interest; and his heart, more youthful and more simple than he had imagined it to be, had bounded forward to meet that other heart which had just revealed itself to him by its aspirations.

The commonest thing in the complicated history of love is the double inoculation of love to which any two hearts are subjected; the one loves nearly always before the other, and the latter almost always follows the ex-

ample. In this way the electric current is established, in proportion to the intensity of the passion which is first kindled. The more Mademoiselle de la Vallière had shown her affection, the more the king's affection had increased. And it was precisely that which had surprised his Majesty. For it had been fairly demonstrated to him that no sympathetic current could have been the means of hurrying his heart away in its course, because there had been no confession of love in the case; because the confession was, in fact, an insult towards the man and towards the sovereign; and finally, because — and the word, too, burned like a hot iron, — because, in fact, it was nothing but a hoax, after all. This girl, therefore, who in strictness could not lay claim to beauty or birth or great intelligence, — who had been selected by Madame herself on account of her unpretending qualities, — had not only aroused the king's regard, but had moreover treated him with disdain, — him, the king, a man who, like an Eastern potentate, had but to bestow a glance, to indicate with his finger, to drop his handkerchief. And since the previous evening his mind had been so absorbed with this girl that he could think and dream of nothing but her. Since the previous evening his imagination had been occupied by clothing her image with all those charms to which she could not lay claim. In very truth, he whom such vast interests summoned, and whom so many women smiled upon invitingly, had since the previous evening consecrated every moment of his time, every throb of his heart, to this sole dream. It was, indeed, either too much or not enough.

The indignation of the king, making him forget everything, and among others that De Saint-Aignan was present, was poured out in the most violent imprecations. True it is that De Saint-Aignan had taken refuge in a

corner of the room, and from his corner regarded the tempest passing over. His own personal disappointment seemed contemptible, in comparison with the anger of the king. He compared with his own petty vanity the prodigious pride of offended majesty; and being well read in the hearts of kings in general, and in those of powerful kings in particular, he began to ask himself if this weight of anger, as yet held in suspense, would not soon terminate by falling upon his own head, for the very reason that others were guilty, and he innocent.

In point of fact, the king all at once did arrest his hurried pace; and fixing a look full of anger upon De Saint-Aignan, suddenly cried out, "And you, De Saint-Aignan?"

De Saint-Aignan made a movement which was intended to signify, "Well, Sire?"

"Yes; you have been as silly as myself, I think."

"Sire!" stammered De Saint-Aignan.

"You permitted yourself to be deceived by this shameful trick."

"Sire," said De Saint-Aignan, whose agitation was such as to make him tremble in every limb, "let me entreat your Majesty not to exasperate yourself. Women, you know, are creatures full of imperfections, created for the misfortune of others; to expect anything good from them is to require them to do impossibilities."

The king, who had the greatest consideration for himself, and who had begun to acquire over his emotions that command which he preserved over them all his life, perceived that he was doing an outrage to his own dignity in displaying so much animation about so trifling an object. "No," he said hastily; "you are mistaken, De Saint-Aignan. I am not angry; I can only wonder that we should have been turned into ridicule so cleverly and

with such boldness, by these two young girls. I am particularly surprised that, although we might have been accurately informed on the subject, we were silly enough to leave the matter for our own hearts to decide upon."

"The heart, Sire, is an organ which requires positively to be reduced to its physical functions, which must be deprived of all moral functions. For my own part, I confess that when I saw that your Majesty's heart was so taken up by this little — "

"My heart taken up! I! My mind might perhaps have been so; but as for my heart, it was — " Louis again perceived that in order to cover one gap he was about to disclose another. "Besides," he added, "I have no fault to find with the girl. I was quite aware that she was in love with some one else."

"The Vicomte de Bragelonne. I informed your Majesty of the circumstance."

"You did so; but you were not the first who told me. The Comte de la Fère had solicited from me Mademoiselle de la Vallière's hand for his son; and on his return from England the marriage shall be celebrated, since they love each other."

"I recognize in that all the generosity of the king."

"So, Saint-Aignan, we will cease to occupy ourselves with these matters any longer," said Louis.

"Yes, we will digest the affront, Sire," replied the courtier, with resignation.

"Besides, it will be a very easy matter to do so," said the king, checking a sigh.

"And by way of a beginning, I will set about the composition of some good epigram upon the trio. I will call it 'The Naiad and the Dryad,' which will please Madame."

"Do so, Saint-Aignan!" said the king, indifferently. "You shall read me your verses; they will amuse me,

Ah! it is of no use, Saint-Aignan," added the king, like a man breathing with difficulty; "the blow requires more than human strength to bear it in a dignified manner."

As the king thus spoke, assuming an air of the most angelic patience, one of the servants in attendance knocked gently at the door. De Saint-Aignan drew aside, out of respect.

"Come in," said the king. The servant partially opened the door. "What is it?" inquired Louis.

The servant held out a letter folded in a triangular shape. "For your Majesty," he said.

"From whom?"

"I do not know. One of the officers on duty gave it to me."

The valet, on a sign from the king, handed him the letter. The king advanced towards the candles, opened the note, read the signature, and uttered a loud cry.

De Saint-Aignan was sufficiently respectful not to look on; but without doing so, he saw and heard all, and ran towards the king, who with a gesture dismissed the servant.

"Oh, heavens!" said the king, as he read the note.

"Is your Majesty unwell?" inquired De Saint-Aignan, stretching forward his arms.

"No, no, Saint-Aignan, — read!" and he handed him the note.

De Saint-Aignan's eyes fell upon the signature. "La Vallière!" he exclaimed. "Oh, Sire!"

"Read, read!"

And De Saint-Aignan read: —

Forgive my importunity, Sire; forgive, especially, the want of formality in this letter. A note seems to me more speedy and more urgent than a despatch. I venture, therefore, to address this note to your Majesty. I have returned to my own room, overcome with grief and fatigue, Sire; and I im

plore of your Majesty the favor of an audience, in which I may tell the truth to my king.

LOUISE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

"Well?" asked the king, taking the letter from De Saint-Aignan's hands, who was completely bewildered by what he had just read.

"Well!" repeated De Saint-Aignan.

"What do you think of it?"

"I hardly know."

"Still, what is your opinion?"

"Sire, the young lady must have heard the muttering of the thunder, and has got frightened."

"Frightened at what?" asked Louis, with dignity.

"Why, your Majesty has a thousand reasons to be angry with the author or authors of so hazardous a joke; and if your Majesty's memory were to be awakened in a disagreeable sense, it would be a perpetual menace hanging over the head of this imprudent girl."

"Saint-Aignan, I do not think as you do."

"Your Majesty doubtless sees more clearly than I do."

"Well! I see affliction and restraint in these lines, and more particularly since I recollect some of the details of the scene which took place this evening in Madame's apartments. In fact —" The king suddenly stopped, leaving his meaning unexpressed.

"In fact," resumed De Saint-Aignan, "your Majesty will grant an audience; nothing is clearer than that in the whole affair."

"I will do better still, Saint-Aignan."

"What is that, Sire?"

"Put on your cloak!"

"But, Sire —"

"You know the room where Madame's maids of honor are lodged?"

"*Certainly.*"

"You know some means of obtaining an entrance there?"

"Oh, as to that, no!"

"At all events, you must be acquainted with some one there."

"Indeed, your Majesty has suggested a very good idea."

"You do know some one, then? Who is it?"

"I know a certain gentleman who is on very good terms with a certain young lady there."

"One of the maids of honor?"

"Yes, Sire."

"With Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, I suppose?" said the king, laughing.

"Unfortunately, no, Sire; with Montalais."

"What is his name?"

"Malicorne."

"And you can depend on him?"

"I believe so, Sire. He ought to have a key of some sort in his possession; and if he should happen to have one, as I have done him a service, why, he will return it."

"Nothing could be better. Let us set off, then."

"I am at your Majesty's service."

The king threw his own cloak over De Saint-Aignan's shoulders, asked him for his, and then both went out into the vestibule.